National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Wrangell-St. Elias
National Park and Preserve

AHTNA AND WRANGELL-ST. ELIAS NATIONAL PARK AND PRESERVE: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW AND ASSESSMENT

By William E. Simeone
and Odin T.W. Miller

2024

As the nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural and cultural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation.

The Cultural Resource Programs of the National Park Service have responsibilities that include stewardship of historic buildings, museum collections, archeological sites, cultural landscapes, oral and written histories, and ethnographic resources.

Our mission is to identify, evaluate and preserve the cultural resources of the park areas and to bring an understanding of these resources to the public. Congress has mandated that we preserve these resources because they are important components of our national and personal identity.

Published by the United States Department of the Interior
through the Government Printing Office.

Wrangell-St Elias National Park and Preserve
Copper Center, Alaska

Design/layout by Francis Broderick, Archgraphics.

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Front cover photograph: Copper Center Potlatch, Good to be exchanged (or) given, March 1925. Archives, University of Alaska Fairbanks-1979-026-0487.
Front cover background: Copper Center Potlatch, Good to be exchanged (or) given, March 1925. Archives, University of Alaska Fairbanks-1979-026-0486.
Back cover background: Copper Center Potlatch, Good to be exchanged (or) given, March 1925. Archives, University of Alaska Fairbanks-1979-026-0487.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, both authors of this publication would like to thank the Ahtna people, and in particular, the elders and culture-bearers whose knowledge is represented on these pages. Ahtna and other Dene elders whose knowledge is cited in this publication include: Mildred Buck, Bacille George, Wilson Justin, Fred Ewan, Eva John, Ruby Sinyon, Frank Stickwan, Elsie Stickwan, Ben Neeley, Frank Billum, Joe Goodlataw, Morrie Secondchief, Jim Tyone, James Sinyon, Walya Hobson, Annie Ewan, Jake Tansy, Tenas Charley, Jim McKinley, Katie John, Fred John Sr., Adam Sanford, M. Starr Knighten, Douglas Billum, Batzulnetas Billy, Jack John Justin, John Nicolai, Fannie Sthienfield, Molly Billum, Martha Jackson, Bill Joe, Maggie Joe, Markle Pete, Mary Anne Billum, Nancy George, Jeanie Maxim, Elizabeth Pete, Andy Brown, Pete Ewan, Nick Jackson, Huston Sanford, Gloria Stickwan, Ina Lincoln, John Billum, Bessie John, Mentasta Pete, Glenda Ewan, Katie Sanford, Virginia Pete, Jerry Charley, Harry Johns, Robert Marshall, Fred John Jr., Roy Ewan, Markle Ewan, Rena Jacomet, Etta Bell, Grandma McKinley, Tenas Jack, Tony Jackson, Jean George, Charley Sanford, and Gene Henry.

Thank you, also, to members of the Ahtna community who consented to allow photographs of themselves and/or their departed relatives to be reproduced in this publication.

Thank you, also, to our NPS reviewers, Barbara Cellarius, Amy Craver, Mike Evans, Rachel Mason, and Lee Reininghaus, who provided comments on the initial draft of this publication.

We owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Dr. Barbara Cellarius, Cultural Anthropologist and Subsistence Coordinator for Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, who administered the cooperative agreement between AITRC and the NPS, reviewed and edited multiple drafts of this publication, provided frequent advice and consultation, and in many ways functioned as a third author.

We thank AITRC Executive Director Karen Linnell, who also administered the AITRC-NPS cooperative agreement, provided input into the manuscript's content, and provided various forms of support throughout the process of writing, editing and preparing this manuscript for publication. AITRC Subsistence Resource Specialist Deanna Kosbruk also provided support with public outreach.

Thank you to Casey Cusick, AITRC's GIS Specialist, for creating the maps found in this volume.

Thank you to Ahtna/Upper Tanana elder Wilson Justin, who reviewed drafts of this work and provided important feedback.

Thank you to Dr. Russell Vanderlugt, who provided us information on upper Chitina River habitation sites from his embargoed PhD dissertation, and to Dr. Ken Pratt, who reviewed what we had written on these sites.

Thank you to Terry Haynes, coauthor of the *Upper Tanana Ethnographic Overview and Assessment* (Simeone and Haynes 2007), from which some entries in the Annotated Bibliography are borrowed.

Thank you to our copyeditor, Dr. Erica Hill, and to our layout person, Francis Broderick, Archgraphics.

Tsin'aen! (Thank you!)

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE

An ethnographic overview and assessment (EO&A) is a cultural anthropological study that aims to document traditional associations between distinct cultural communities and landscapes, places or resources. Within the national park system in Alaska, EO&As are commonly conducted when it is believed or determined that Alaska Native groups, or other contemporary cultural groups, have customary and traditional use patterns or other ties to resources within a national park. The goal of a project is not only to document these patterns of resource use, but more generally, to document natural and cultural features of the park area that hold meaning for the group. To complete this process, researchers synthesize existing ethnographic information on the group and its use of and ties to the park. This is then used to identify data gaps that may need to be addressed in future research.

This overview of Alaska Native history and culture in the Ahtna Region of eastern interior Alaska focuses on the Ahtna communities associated with Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. These communities include *Mendaesde* (Mentasta), *Tsis Tl'edze' Caegge* (Cheesh'na or Chistochina), *Ggax Kuna'* (Gakona), *C'uul C'ena* (Gulkana), *Tezdlen Cae'e* (Tazlina), *Tl'aticae'e* (Kluti Kaah or Copper Center), and *Tsedi Na'* (Chitina). *Yidateni Na'* (Cantwell) is an Ahtna community on western edge of the Ahtna homeland more closely connected to Denali National Park and Preserve.

We use existing ethnographic and historical sources (and some information from our own fieldwork) to describe Ahtna culture as it existed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. We also examine the longstanding relationships of Ahtna to lands in and near the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, primarily in the northern part of the Copper River Basin.

A primary target audience for this EO&A is staff at Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, who may not have specialized training in anthropology, but who want to learn more about Ahtna, their culture and recent history. Such knowledge has a multiple purposes: It can help inform park planning and cultural and natural resource management decision-making and can help to strengthen government-to-government relationships between the park and Ahtna communities. It can also facilitate development of interpretive materials for use in educating the public and orienting new employees to the cultural context of the park. Equally importantly, we hope that some Ahtna will find this report to be a useful companion to Simeone's (2018) *Ahtna: Netseh Dae' Tkughit'e' "Before Us, It Was Like This"* – an ethnographic and historical overview commissioned by Ahtna, Inc. and completed with intensive input from a panel of Ahtna culture-bearers. While this present volume directly parallels Simeone (2018) in many places,[1] it also draws from new sources of data (e.g., a more thorough review of de Laguna and McClellan's fieldnotes) and includes a detailed overview of Ahtna sites in and near the park (Chapter 8). Other important audiences are researchers, park visitors, and the general public who are interested in learning more about the Ahtna and their deep roots in what is now Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve.

METHODOLOGY

This EO&A is a broad synthesis of Ahtna culture and history. It is derived from published and unpublished ethnographic and historical literature as well as archival materials available in repositories in Fairbanks, Juneau, and Valdez. Additionally, both authors have worked in the Ahtna homeland and have drawn upon personal experiences, unpublished materials, and photographs for this report. We have also compiled an annotated bibliography that contains both the sources used in this report and other materials that can be consulted for further information about the culture and history of Ahtna.

[1]This decision to parallel parts of Simeone (2018) was made due to the fact that the information in the earlier volume is still quite current, and it was written in collaboration with a committee of Ahtna elders and culture-bearers, thus reflecting Ahtna priorities and values.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

The literature we surveyed can be divided into several broad categories: historical documents and articles produced by historians, ethnographic data collected by cultural anthropologists, linguistic data that is of ethnographic interest, and data collected by archaeologists. Historical documents include maps and written reports. Perhaps the earliest historical document showing the Ahtna homeland is a map published in 1839 by Rear Admiral Ferdinand von Wrangell (1980 [1839]), Governor of Alaska from 1830 to 1835. The map is significant, not only because it is the earliest, but also because it demonstrates the Native presence in the region. Made with information collected from a variety of sources, the map shows trade routes used by Native traders, Native villages, and important geographical features such as the Chitina, Chistochina, Tazlina, and Susitna rivers.

After Russia ceded Alaska to the United States in 1867, soldiers, miners, prospectors, geologists, and topographers ventured into the Ahtna homeland, providing considerable documentation of Native use and occupancy of the region (Abercrombie 1900; Allen 1887; Austin 1968; Capps 1915; Cashman 1900; Castner 1900; Mendenhall and Schrader 1903; Moffit 1909, 1910, 1918, 1936, 1938; Moffit and Knopf 1909; Moffit and Mertie 1923; Powell 1909; Remington 1939; Schrader 1900; Treloar 1898).

In 1885, Lt. Henry Allen (1887) became the first American to ascend the Copper River. Ordered to make a reconnaissance of the Copper River and obtain "all information which will be valuable and important, especially to the military branch of the Government" (Allen 1887, 11), Allen's report provides significant information about the Ahtna and their culture at the end of the nineteenth century. In 1898, gold was discovered on the Klondike River in what is now the Yukon Territory, Canada. Americans demanded an "all-American route" to the Klondike, and in 1899, several thousand prospectors swarmed over the Valdez Glacier, and up the Copper River in hopes of reaching the Klondike goldfields. A number of them (Austin 1968; Hazelet 2013; Margeson 1997; Treloar 1898) left accounts of their travels through the Ahtna homeland. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the United States Geological Survey (USGS) began systematically mapping the territory of Alaska. Geologists such as Fred Moffit and Stephen R. Capps made frequent trips to the region compiling information, not only on the geology, but also on the Ahtna. Moffit (n.d.), for example, collected place names in the upper Copper River, while Capps (1915) commented on the effects of the Chisana gold rush. Colonization of the Ahtna homeland began soon after the gold rush of 1898, when the US government sent bureaucrats (Romig 1909) and teachers (Jones 1912a, b, 1913 a, b, c; Miller 1916) to establish a government presence and teach school. Information from this early stage of colonization includes correspondence, maps, and census data. In sum, historical sources often provide only a brief glimpse of the Ahtna, but when combined with other sources of data, they help to construct a more complete picture of Ahtna history and culture.

Contemporary writings about the history of the Russian colonial period include A.V. Grinev's two articles "On the Banks of the Copper River: The Ahtna Indians and the Russians" (1993) and "The Forgotten Expedition of Dimitrii Tarkhanov on the Copper River" (1997), as well as A. Znamenski's *Through Orthodox Eyes: Russian Missionary Narratives of Travels to the Dena'ina and Ahtna 1850s–1930s* (2003). Other historical narratives include William Hanable's *Alaska's Copper River: The 18th and 19th Centuries* (1982), and Lone Janson's *The Copper Spike* (1978), which described the development of the Kennecott copper mine. Ronald Simpson's fictionalized *Legacy of the Chief* (2001) also delves into the history of the copper mine, but from the perspective of Ahtna.

Of particular interest for this project are sources whose primary purpose is ethnography, the study and systematic recording of human culture. Often collected by cultural anthropologists, ethnographic data may document any or all facets of a human culture, including religion, social organization, political structure, geographic knowledge, ecological knowledge, economy, and material culture. Methods for collecting ethnographic data include interviews, surveys, archival research, and participant observation (participating in the life of the community). Ethnography focuses primarily on the ethnographic present, a description of culture that is within the memory of those interviewed.

Perhaps the earliest systematic effort to collect ethnographic data on the Ahtna was the fieldwork of Frederica de Laguna and Catharine McClellan. Together, they made trips to the Ahtna homeland in 1954, 1958, and 1960. De Laguna made a final trip in 1968 with her student Marie-Françoise Guédon. Both de Laguna and McClellan had considerable experience working with Native elders; their skill, empathy, and knowledge are reflected in their fieldnotes, which provide considerable information and insight into Ahtna culture. While they never published a full-length ethnography, de Laguna wrote two articles, one describing Ahtna beliefs about the relationship between humans and animals (1969–70), and another on matrilineal kin groups that included a discussion of the Ahtna social system (1975). McClellan (1975a) produced an article on warfare. In 1981 de Laguna and McClellan published an overview of Ahtna culture in *Subarctic*, volume 6 of the *Handbook of North American Indians*. Two other ethnographic works on the Ahtna are B. S. Strong's (1972) unpublished dissertation on economic changes brought by the fur-trade in Mentasta and Holly Reckord's two-volume set. One of the two volumes, *That's the Way We Live* (Reckord 1983a), is an account of subsistence in the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. The other, *Where Raven Stood* (Reckord 1983b), is a guide to understanding the historical and archaeological significance of Ahtna historical sites. In compiling the latter, Reckord interviewed Ahtna elders and relied on two unpublished lists of Ahtna historical sites: de Laguna's (1970) "Sites in Ahtna Territory, Copper River Basin" and Constance West's (1973) "Inventory of Trails and Habitation Sites in the Ahtna Region." Other recent ethnographic and historical work on the Ahtna combining archival information and original interviews includes *Mentasta Remembers*, written by Cynthea Ainsworth along with Katie and Fred John and published by Mentasta Traditional Council in 2002; two unpublished manuscripts by Ainsworth (1999, 2001) on Chistochina Village history and the Ahtna; and *Along the Ałs'e'tnaey-Nal'cine Trail*, authored by William E. Simeone and published by Mount Sanford Tribal Consortium in 2014.

The most comprehensive list of Ahtna place names is the *Ahtna Place Names Lists* (Kari 2014; with earlier editions from 1983, 2003, and 2008) edited by James Kari and compiled by Kari and Ahtna elder Mildred Buck. The 2014 edition includes more than 2,500 place names of geographic features and historical sites. The list is not annotated, but each entry includes an Ahtna place name with a translation into English, an official USGS and/or colloquial English place name, and a location. Since the 1970s, Kari has been the principal academic studying the Ahtna language. His interests are grammar, lexicography, and geography, particularly place names. In the 1970s and early 1980s, James Kari worked with Ahtna elder Jim McKinley to record McKinley's "Ahtna Village Names along the Copper River." This unpublished manuscript is a translation of McKinley's description and explanation of Ahtna place names along the Copper River from below the town of Chitina to Mentasta. In 1987, Kari and anthropologist James Fall published *Shem Pete's Alaska: The Territory of the Upper Cook Inlet Dena'ina, an Annotated and Mapped Ethnography of Traditional Dena'ina Place Names*, followed by a second edition in 2003. The volume includes considerable content on western Ahtna culture and place names at the Ahtna-Dena'ina borderlands, including the Matanuska River valley and parts of the upper Susitna drainage. In 1990, Kari published the *Ahtna Athabaskan Dictionary*.

Although Kari's principal interests are language and geography, his work has significantly increased our knowledge of Ahtna culture and history. In 1986 Kari, with the assistance of several Ahtna elders, published *Tatl'ahwt'aenn Nenn': The Headwaters People's Country*, a collection of historical and geographic narratives from Upper Ahtna oral tradition. In "Copper River Native Places: A Report on Culturally Important Places to Alaska Native Tribes in Southcentral Alaska" (2005), Kari and Siri Tuttle contextualized this Ahtna place name work within a variety of ethnographic topics. In 2018, Kari and Tuttle, again with help of Ahtna elders, published another collection of oral narratives, entitled *Yenida'a Tah, Ts'utsaede, K'adiide: Mythical Times, Ancient Times, Recent Times: An Anthology of Ahtna Narratives*. In addition to the historical narratives, Kari and Tuttle (2018) also emphasized mythical *yenida'a* tales. Both volumes contain considerable ethnographic information.

Several publications have addressed the topic of Ahtna ecological knowledge and relationships to their environment, a key theme in debates within the broader fields of ethnography and cultural anthropology. Frederica de Laguna's (1969–70) "The Atna of the Copper River, Alaska: The World of Men and Animals" provides a general overview of the Ahtna perspective on the relationship between humans and animals. Simeone and Kari (2002, 2005) and Simeone et al. (2007) have documented Ahtna knowledge of salmon and other fish.

Other sources on Ahtna ecological knowledge include de Laguna and McClellan's unpublished fieldnotes, an expansive collection of interviews with elders and observations from research in Copper Basin villages during 1954, 1958, 1960 (see also de Laguna and Guédon 1968). These fieldnotes are located in the archives of the Alaska Native Language Center at the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF), the Ahtna Heritage Foundation in Copper Center, and the Alaska State Library Historical Collections in Juneau. The Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission (AITRC) office in Glennallen, and the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve office in Copper Center have both obtained digital copies of most of these fieldnotes. In addition to the fieldnotes, de Laguna and McClellan took hundreds of photographs during their fieldwork. Most of these are available at the Alaska State Library Historical Collections; AITRC has digital copies.

Although hundreds of interviews with Ahtna knowledge-bearers have been recorded. transcribed, or both, most of these are in archives or collections, and not widely accessible to the public. A notable exception is the oral interviews available online at Project Jukebox, a web-based collection of oral histories produced by the Oral History Program at UAF, itself part of the Alaska and Polar Regions Collections of the UAF Rasmuson Library. In the early 1990s, the National Park Service (NPS) funded the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve Project Jukebox to document local residents' experiences related to the park. Additional interviews were conducted in 1998–2002, and in 2014–15. Altogether, these interviews were conducted in Anchorage, Chisana, Chistochina, Chitina, Copper Center, Dot Lake, Fairbanks, Gakona, Glennallen, Gulkana, Kennecott, Nabesna, Northway, Slana, Tanacross, Tazlina, Tetlin, Tok, Valdez, and Yakutat, and with NPS employees.

Research documenting land and resource-use patterns in the Ahtna region emerged as an important area of inquiry after passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) of 1971 (Public Law 92-203, 85 Stat. 688, December 18, 1971), and implementation of state and federal subsistence legislation in 1978 (Chapter 151, State Laws of Alaska) and 1980 (Title VIII of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980, Public Law 96-487, 94 Stat. 2371, December 2, 1980). Because of their accessibility via the Alaska road system, the Copper River salmon fisheries and Nelchina herd caribou hunts attract participants from urban areas of the state, creating conflicts over resource allocation. Since the 1980s, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Subsistence has produced reports on subsistence and contemporary land-use patterns in Ahtna communities. Many of these reports contain historical and ethnographic data, including scattered references to Ahtna "traditional knowledge," as well as quantitative data on the harvest and use of wildlife resources (Fall and Simeone 2010; Fall and Stratton 1984; Holen et al. 2015; Kukkonen and Zimpelman 2012; La Vine et al. 2013; La Vine and Zimpelman 2014; Simeone 2006; Simeone and Fall 2003; Simeone et al. 2007; Stanek 1981; Stratton 1982; Stratton and Georgette 1984).

There is also a considerable history of archaeological research in the Copper River Basin. Froelich Rainey (n.d., 1940) conducted the earliest archaeological surveys in the Ahtna homeland beginning in 1936, including test excavations at Gulkana and Batzulnetas. In 1953 archaeologist William Irving (1957) investigated the Tyone Lake area and interviewed Jimmy Secondchief, a noted Ahtna elder, documenting both archaeological sites and subsistence activities. Their collaboration produced important information about sites and land-use patterns in the area. At about the same time, James VanStone (1955) conducted excavations at *Taghaelden* (Taral).

Prompted by construction of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline, archaeologists undertook several research projects in the Ahtna homeland during the 1970s. William Workman conducted surveys along the pipeline right of way, discovering Ahtna sites at Gulkana, the confluence of the Copper and Tazlina rivers, and Dakah Den'nin's Village near Chitina. Workman conducted additional excavations at Gulkana, dubbed by archaeologists the Ringling Site or GUL-077. Using data from these excavations, Workman developed an overview of Ahtna prehistory (Workman 1977). Katherine Arndt (1977) also used data from the Ringling site to describe Ahtna cache pits. In June and July of 1973 Anne Shinkwin (1979) directed large-scale excavations at Dakah Den'nin's Village,[2] unearthing numerous copper implements. Her findings fit well with Ahtna oral history that attributes control of copper resources to three lower Ahtna *denae*, or chiefs,[3] who lived near the mouth of the Chitina River. These *denae* were *Ts'es K'e Denen*, "Person of on the Rock" (O'Brien Creek); *Taghael Denen*, "Person of Barrier in Water" (chief of Taral); and *Hwt'aa Cae'e Denen*, "Person of Beneath [the mountains] Stream Mouth" (Fox Creek) (F. Billum 1992). Archaeologists think Ahtna began working copper more than 1,000 years ago (Thomas et al. 2020, 126–27), producing arrowheads, awls, beads, personal adornment, knife blades, and copper wire (Cooper 2012; Workman 1977). Particularly rich deposits of raw copper are located within a 100-mile arc stretching between the Kotsina and Chitistone rivers (Mendenhall and Schrader 1903:16; Moffit and Maddren 1909, 47). Within Ahtna territory, there are twenty place names that incorporate the Ahtna word for copper (*tsetsaan*' or *tsedi*) – thirteen of those are in the Chitina River drainage.

In 1975 archaeologist Charles Holmes discovered two nineteenth-century Ahtna sites at Paxson Lake. Using data from these sites, labeled the Knoll Site and the Point Site, James Ketz (1983) determined the Paxson Lake sites had a prehistoric component but had also been used in historical times as seasonal camps for caribou hunting. In the mid-1980s archaeologist Robert Betts (1987) conducted research for the Susitna Hydroelectric Project. Betts consulted with Ahtna elder Jake Tansy, who provided data on land-use patterns, species harvested, and details on caribou hunting at Butte Lake. In 1980, Kathryn K. Cohen published *A History of the Gulkana River*, a natural history based on archaeological research conducted for the Alaska Department of Natural Resources.

Archaeological research was stimulated by passage of ANCSA, which included Section 14(h)(1), allowing Native Corporations to select lands considered to be historical or cemetery sites. In 1977 the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) established an archaeological program with the purpose of investigating and certifying selected sites. Ahtna, Incorporated claimed sites in large tracts of the Copper River Basin and the upper Susitna and Nenana river drainages. BIA archaeologists investigated these selections, resulting in hundreds of site reports, oral history recordings, and field maps providing both archaeological and ethnographic data. Sites varied from "lithic scatters" to trapping cabins, fishing sites, graves, battle sites, and villages.

Global climate change is increasing the rate of glacial melt worldwide, leading to the discovery of both historic and prehistoric artifacts. The first archaeological survey on melting glaciers and ice patches in Alaska was conducted along the northern border of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. This research revealed several well-preserved artifacts including wooden arrow shafts, bone projectile points, and a fragment of a birch-bark basket (Dixon et al. 2005). Other recent archaeological research has focused on defining the shores of glacial Lake Atna. National Park Service archaeologists have identified sixty-nine archaeological sites, one of which dated to 12,000 years ago, along the shoreline (Reininghaus 2019).

A few notes are in order about the conventions used in this report. Transliterations of Ahtna words, phrases, and place names used in this report are generally in accordance with Kari's 1990 *Ahtna Athabaskan Dictionary* and 2014 *Ahtna Place Names Lists*. Some transliterations that appear within quotes

[2]Note this site was the home of a chief called *Hwt'aa Cae' Denen* or "Person of Beneath [the mountains] Stream Mouth" and was known as *Hwt'aa Cae'e* or "enclosed mouth."

[3]*Denae* were a type of Ahtna political leader, along with *kaskae*. *Denae* were distinguished from *kaskae*' by inherited titles that associated each *denae* with a specific place strategically located near important resources such as copper and salmon. *Denae* and *kaskae* are discussed at length in the "Ahtna Leadership" section of Chapter 4 (Ahtna Social and Political Culture).

from other sources differ slightly from those used elsewhere in the text. However, wherever transliterations within quotes are different enough from Kari's renderings that they would not be readily recognizable to the casual reader, they are replaced with standardized renderings in brackets. This frequently occurs, for example, in the de Laguna/McClellan/Guédon fieldnotes. Most Ahtna words and phrases used in this text are glossed in Appendix A: Glossary, as well as being defined when first introduced.

CHAPTER 2: AHTNA GEOGRAPHY AND TRADITIONAL TERRITORY

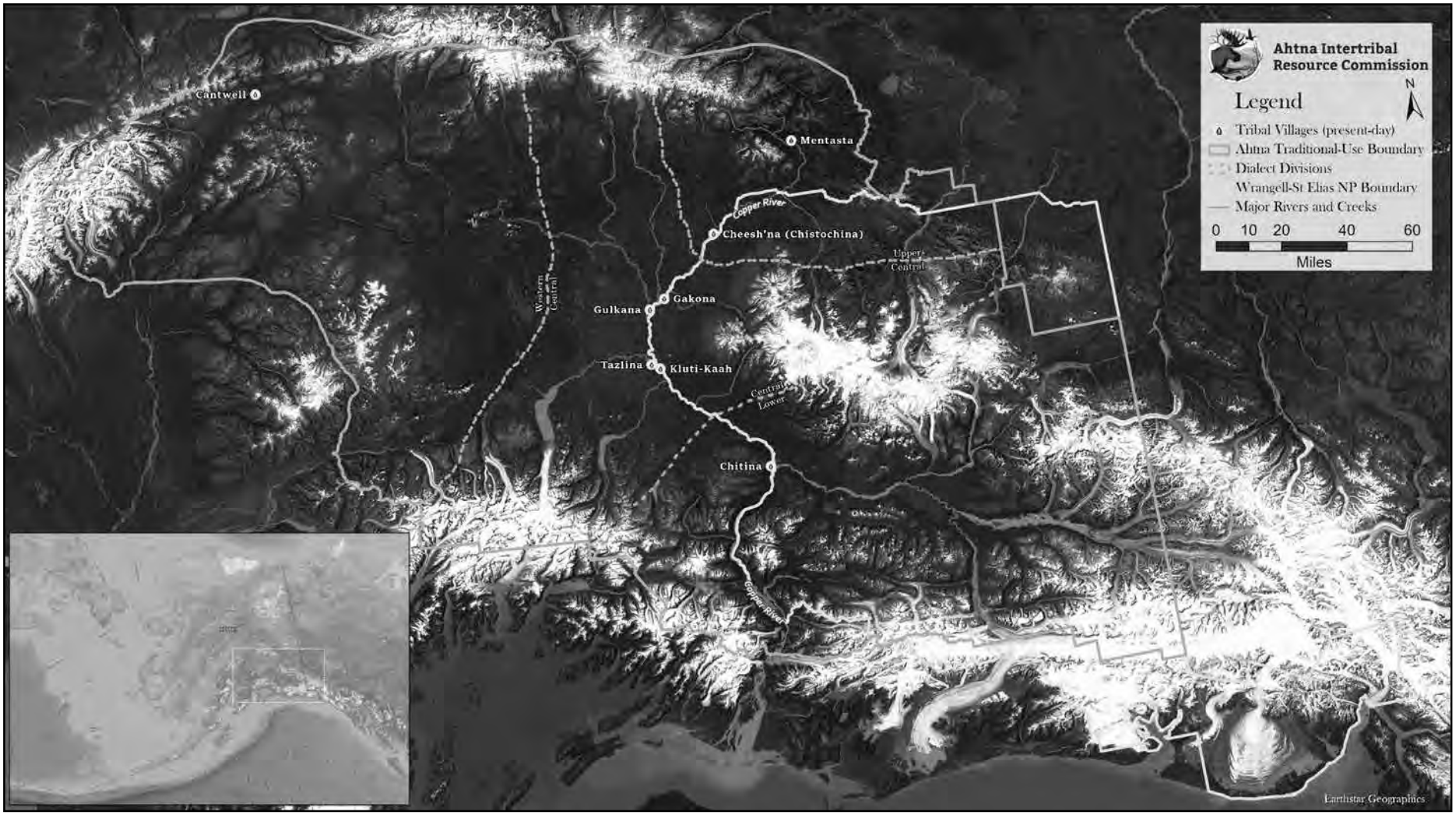
Surrounded by the Alaska, Talkeetna, Chugach, and St. Elias mountains, the Ahtna homeland includes the entire Copper River Basin, the highlands of the upper Susitna River to the west, and parts of the upper Tanana River drainage to the northeast (Map 1) – a total area of approximately 40,000 square miles. At its center are the Wrangell Mountains with some of the highest summits in North America, including Mt. Blackburn (el. 16,390 feet), Mt. Sanford (el. 16,237 feet) and Mt. Wrangell (el. 14,163 feet). The Copper River, called *'Atna'* or "beyond river" in the Ahtna language (Kari and Fall 2003, 45), originates from Copper Glacier on the northeast side of Mt. Wrangell and flows for 290 miles into the Gulf of Alaska. The Susitna River, called *Sasutna'* or "sand river," originates in the Alaska Range and flows southwest into Cook Inlet.

Figure 1: Mt. Drum seen from near Glennallen. Photo courtesy of Sterling Spilinek.

The longevity of the Ahtna presence in Alaska is evident from the 2,500 Ahtna place names compiled by the linguist James Kari with the aid of Ahtna elders. Virtually all major drainages, accessible hills, mountains, and ridges are named, and all the names appear to be Northern Dene in origin (Kari and Tuttle 2005, 5).

In the nineteenth century, Ahtna were organized into four groups, based on dialectical differences in language and the region each group inhabited. These four groups were:

- Upper Ahtna – "headwaters people" or *Tatl'ahwt'aene;*
- Western Ahtna – "small tree or timber people" or *Hwtsaay Hwt'aene* ;
- Central Ahtna – "*Ahtna* people," "people of the Copper River," or *'Atnahwt'aene;* and
- Lower Ahtna – "*Ahtna* people," "people of the Copper River," or *'Atnahwt'aene.*



Map 1: Approximate boundaries of Ahtna traditional-use territory, dialect divisions within the Ahtna homeland, and boundaries of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. Map created by Casey Cusick, AITRC.

Lower Ahtna occupied most of the Copper River drainage between Miles Lake and near the mouth of the Dadina River, including the entire Chitina River drainage. Farther up the river were the Central Ahtna, whose traditional-use territory comprised areas around the Tazlina, Gulkana and Gakona river drainages. Upper Ahtna inhabited the Copper Basin headwaters and the upper Tok River. Western Ahtna territory included much of the Upper Susitna drainage, but their homeland also included parts of the Copper River Basin, such as the upper Tazlina watershed.

While these four regional groupings reflect general cultural and linguistic variation, nineteenth-century Ahtna, themselves, also recognized other significant divisions. In many ways, clan affiliation played a major role in Indigenous socio-political groupings. The affiliation of Ahtna with specific winter villages was also an extremely important marker of identity. Ainsworth (2001, 9) pointed out that even the

Figure 2: Adam Sanford's fish wheel, Chistochina, with Mt. Sanford, Wrangell Mountains, beyond, August 10, 1954. Alaska State Library, Frederica de Laguna Photo Collection, P350-54-11-29.

term "Ahtna" has considerable limitations: "Each historic village, hunting or fishing region had a name that people with familial ties to those areas might use in identifying themselves, but the term 'Ahtna' has not yet been accepted throughout the Copper Basin as an appropriate universal reference for this unique language and culture area." However, pre-contact Ahtna did recognize and differentiate three of the four regional groupings (Reckord 1983b, 28): *Tatl'ahwt'aene* (Upper Ahtna), *Hwtsaay Hwt'aene* (Western Ahtna), and *'Atnahwt'aene*, which referred to both Lower and Central Ahtna. The four subgroups correspond to variation in the Ahtna language and are useful for conveying some of the regional variation in land and resource use.

Each regional group was composed of several extended families – people related through clan affiliation or marriage. Individuals were classified or recognized by their clan affiliation and where they lived. One clan was usually dominant and asserted its inherent right over a specific territory (Justin 1992). The

Chitina River, for example, was considered *Udzisyu* country, while the upper Copper River belonged to the *'Ałts'e'tnaey* clan. Tyone Lake was *Tsisyu* but became *Taltsiine* as the *Tsisyu* men married *Taltsiine* women.

Political power was vested in leaders referred to in the Ahtna language as *kaskae* and *denae*. *Kaskae* were high ranking individuals who were considered spokesmen for the group. *Denae* appear to have held a higher status than *kaskae* and were considered to be great or important persons who held a hereditary title associated with a particular winter village and surrounding territory.[1]

As the most senior male member of a clan, the *denae* was clan leader, and oversaw the clan's territory. For example, in the nineteenth century, *Taghael Denen* (the chief at Taral) was leader of the *Udzisyu* (caribou) clan. This *denae* ruled much of the Chitina River drainage, as it was considered *Udzisyu* country. *Denae* often grew more powerful by cultivating alliances beyond their home territories, and even beyond the Ahtna homeland (Ainsworth 1999, 25). The institution of marriage played a key role in facilitating such alliances – *denae* and *kaskae* men commonly had multiple wives from different clans. Marriage also helped to facilitate access to other clans' territories (de Laguna and McClellan 1981, 657; Pratt 1998, 84), which was especially important during times of food shortage.

AHTNA TERRITORIES AND TERRITORIALITY

Ahtna territory embraced a variety of terrains with stretches of river, wooded hillsides, open rolling tundra, and high mountain peaks. Each family group had one or more winter villages surrounded by summer salmon fishing sites, upland hunting camps, winter traplines, spring lakeside camps, and hunting areas. Winter villages often comprised one or two large, multifamily semi-subterranean houses, or *nitsiil*. These villages were linked to outlying camps and traplines by an extensive system of trails or routes traveled by foot, and after 1900, by dog team. Seasonally used fish camps included shelters, drying racks, and underground caches. Each of these was located on the Copper River or one of its major tributaries. Hunting camps were found in the surrounding mountains or on major lakes such as Klutina Lake and Tanada Lake. Hunting territories were identified with men, while salmon fishing sites were considered the domain of women and connected with the women's clan of the associated village (de Laguna and McClellan 1981, 644; Reckord 1983a, 33).

Ahtna recognized territorial rights based on continual use and occupation. Territorial boundaries were enforced, but obligations based on kinship and clan affiliation required food resources be shared, especially in times of shortage. As a result, many people had some recognized right to resources in another family group's territory (Reckord 1983b, 76–78). Uninvited interlopers, however, risked being killed on sight (de Laguna and McClellan 1981, 644). An unidentified Ahtna man described what could happen to strangers who trespassed:

> [If] they hunt your country, men, get fight. Other men you see [in] you country, got to beat 'em up good, not so come back your country.
>
> Old days is bad. Got law. [If] they see each other, different people, just kill 'em. Never stop. That's why no Indian much in this world, I think. Out in the woods find ten or fifteen [strange] men, and kill. If don't talk our language, [we] kill 'em. Really danger them days. Lots of people say that. That's why people don't go 'round and meet each other. That's why [we] stay [with] own nation all the time. Thirty or forty go together [travel in large groups]. And have watchman. Every time they go somebody country just kill. Bad people that country. Still kill 'em off.
>
> When new people come, got to watch out. Don't give them a chance. Got to know why they are coming. Got deputy to ask why they are coming. Then everything good, OK (McClellan 1975a, 227).

[1]See the "Ahtna Leadership" section of Chapter 4 for a more detailed discussion of *denae* and *kaskae*.

American explorers observed several instances where non-local Native people were reluctant to enter a "foreign" or "alien" territory. While at Mentasta, Quartermaster Clerk John F. Rice encountered a group of Upper Tanana Dene from Ketchumstuk, who told him "they [the Ketchumstuk Natives] had no right in this section of the country and were prepared to defend themselves if necessary" (Rice 1900, 786). Later during his trip, Rice reported that his Ketchumstuk guide refused to trespass into another territory because the penalty was death unless he could show a permit from the local chief (Rice 1900, 786).

However, boundaries between territories were often somewhat more fluid than in western systems of land tenure and did not always comport neatly with western terms and concepts. As Ainsworth (1999, 41) put it, "the discussion of traditional territory is not a straight forward [*sic*] matter of longitude and [latitude] or town-like boundaries." Jim McKinley's ambiguous responses to de Laguna and McClellan's questioning probably hint at some of this complexity:

> [Question:] Did each nation have its special place to hunt?
>
> [Answer:] Yeh, yeh, they do. They use different land. [Then goes on to deny clan territory]. I don't know. They all mix, I know that. You can't divide up land that time. I don't think so… (de Laguna and McClellan 1960, Box 7.1, 7.5.60; bracketed text in original).

According to Reckord (1983b, 76), areas around winter village sites were most closely associated with the bands that inhabited them, but the greater the distance one traveled from these sites, the weaker the association became. Parts of the landscape that were in between two bands' territories were something of a "no-man's land" that members of either band might use.

As noted above, territories also tended to be associated with specific clans. Joe Goodlataw said Taral was an *Udzisyu* village but some *Naltsiine* lived there. *Nahwt'en Cae'e* ("situations recur mouth") "was a *Dik'aagiyu* village," and "old man McKinley John was the last man there. He was married to a *Tsisyu* woman" (de Laguna and McClellan 1954, Box 5.1, 7.8.54). Bacille George said Tanacross, Tetlin, and Gulkana are *Dik'aagiyu* and *'Ałts'e'tnaey*, meaning that most of the people in those communities are members of either clan (de Laguna and McClellan 1954, Box 5.2, 7.25.54).

The Ahtna homeland is multidimensional space comprising land, animals, plants, water, air, and human beings. It is a terrain lived in and lived with. Wilson Justin put it this way when he talked about his home territory of the upper Copper River:

> So when I say "Nabesna" I'm not talking about where I was born, I'm talking about the idea that my family and my clan lived, hunted, died, and spent their time in the area called Nabesna. Not just where I was born, but the whole area.
>
> When I say Nabesna, I'm not talking about a specific plot of ground, 20 or 30 acres that I was born in. I'm talking about the trails that led through to Nabesna, the trails that lead up and down the river, the hunting trails that go to the sheep [hunting] sites – the camps that we…have used for hunting areas for centuries.
>
> So you don't say "I'm from Nabesna" in a street sense. You say, "I'm from the area where my clan has obtained exclusive use and jurisdiction over many, many, many thousands of years["] (quoted in Ainsworth 1999, 43).

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as Russia claimed Alaska and then sold it to the United States, the two colonizing powers began laying the foundation for a very different model of territories and land tenure. Through the early decades of the twentieth century, however, many Ahtna

Figure 3: Ahtna on the trail. Women and men pull the sledges. The dogs carry packs. The child in the sledge is wearing a hood decorated with buttons. Photograph taken about 1900. Frederick John Date papers, Archives and Special Collections, Consortium Library, University of Alaska Anchorage.

remained largely unfamiliar with these exogenous political systems, as the colonial government had not yet developed the infrastructure to control Ahtna lands in any meaningful way. Fred Ewan described the irony of having economic contacts with Euro-Americans, while being unaware of the political systems underwriting these outsiders' presence on Alaska Native lands:

> Them days we don't – we don't have to [respect] for anything, except just ourselves. We taught that's our stuff and our country, you know. We don't know. We don't know somebody sold the land with us you know. We don't know that somebody got our land – we thought that's our land, all time. All the way through, we didn't know till the [Russian], [they steal] with us you know and they're the one first one coming you know. First come down Anchorage area you know. And Cordova. Valdez, where they come. You know we trade with them down, Palmer. They have a big [?] store there you know. We trade with them, they never tell us nothing. They don't know, you know they think they got our land, you know (Ewan 1999).

The hundreds of gold prospectors who poured into the Ahtna homeland at the end of the 1800s posed the first major challenge to the Ahtna system of land tenure. Copper River Joe, a prospector who

wrote an account of this gold rush, described an encounter between Chief Billum and a group of miners seeking to prospect for gold on the foothills of Mt. Wrangell:

> Before leaving Copper Center, Chief Billum, [*sic*] (not William or Billy) told the gold seekers the following, when they asked for advice and information as to the lay and nature of the country to be prospected: "Halo gold" (No gold). "Hiu Chittyston" (much copper stone). "Hiu chuck" (strong swift waters). "Halo moose" (no moose).[2] He made many strenuous gestures and remarks seemingly to discourage and keep them from going to the district sought, and the miners naturally took the most of them as a protest against killing off some of Chief Billum's billy goats of which quite a flock was known to range on a certain spur of Mt. Blackburn. There were numerous other flocks on the spurs of Mt. Wrangell also. No fair-minded person could blame this brave old chief for his plea on behalf of his people's hunting grounds. What happened is only pioneer history on every new frontier (Remington 1939).

As the twentieth century progressed, the steady influx of outsiders onto Ahtna traditional lands gradually made the old system of territories untenable. Initially, the trapping economy and the introduction of dog teams for transportation, combined with changes to the Ahtna social structure, pushed the Ahtna system of territories to become increasingly controlled by individuals and small families rather than broader communities. By the 1930s and 1940s, many Ahtna had settled into permanent villages and were no longer able to occupy their traditional lands in as extensive of a way as they once had. Nevertheless, the legacy of territorial affiliation has continued into the early twenty-first century. Under ANCSA, both regional corporations and village corporations selected land based, in large part, on the long-term use by the ancestors of the current residents. As such, Alaska Native regional and village corporation lands[3] are not just private property but inherited territory with all the emotional attachments. As Eva John of Mentasta explained: "[…] you know your ancestors, you know, roam these countries, your people lived off the land and to you it's what they handed down to you, you know, they've brought down, you know, these thing to us and it's been handed down from them to our parents and to us and myself […]" (John 1988).

Village lands are considered bounded territories, and it is considered highly inappropriate for outsiders or non-residents to enter these territories or use the resources without express permission.

Upper Ahtna

Upper Ahtna lands included the head of the Copper River Basin, from just below the Chistochina River. This is reflected in this group's name, *Tatl'ahwt'aenn* or "Headwaters people." Wilson Justin has described Upper Ahtna lands:

> The original boundaries for the upper Headwaters people began near Sanford River on the east side of the mountains and ran west and north. The first landmark was Tulsona Creek about mile 17 on the Tok Cutoff. The trail that winds up the creek to the Muskrat Lakes was used both by Chistochina and Gakona. […] It should be noted that the Gakona River was not a boundary, although it is not far from the Tulsona Creek. From the lakes bearing north to Sinona Lake takes you to undisputed Headwaters People Territory. From Sinona Lake, all of the drainages of the Chistochina River, the Indian River and the Slana River were Headwaters People Territory.

[2] Chief Billum's statements reported here are not in Ahtna but in Chinook, a trade language that was widespread throughout the Pacific Northwest during much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

[3] Due to the particularities of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA), the vast majority of Alaska Native tribes do not own lands – village and regional Alaska Native corporations own them instead. See Chapter 7 for further discussion of ANCSA and Alaska Native land claims.

> Continuing along the Alaska Range down the Dry Tok River through Gillette Pass with a landmark at the head of the Tok River now called Tushtena Pass. The Tok River was a dividing line. Because the Tok Cutoff was built on portions of our trails, the highway crosses the river right underneath one of our "lookout points" which is half-way up the mountainside. When you cross the Tok River Bridge look straight ahead and up. You are staring directly at it.
>
> The highway meanwhile takes a sharp right going on to Tok itself. We have a name for this lookout as we did for all of them. Jerry Charley knows the name of the point as does Robert John Sr. It was first told to me by [Huston] Sanford but I had long ago forgotten about it until Jerry Charley spoke of the place. From the lookout point we turn southeast. We will be working our way up the little Tok River to Tuck Creek now in the Tetlin Indian Reservation. From the Tuck Creek/Tetlin River we curve around the foothills, passing a hill now called Taixtsalda. Less than a day's journey takes us past the Nabesna River and over to Jatahmund Lake. Now deep into Medicine Men Territory we go due east into Canada and stop at a point midway to Kluane Lake and steer south by west until we hit the White River. Following the White we come to a fork. One will take us into the headwaters of the Chitina River; the other will take us to Chisana.
>
> These are well known trails and were called the *'Ałts'e' Tnaey* Trail, although in the Yukon Territory, the White River and the upper Chitina, it was all *Naltsiine* Country. It was said, but I don't know, that the *Naltsiine* Trail came to within 50 miles of the old Village of Taral before control of the trail was relinquished. In the meantime the Chisana portion came over the Cooper Pass, went up the Jacksina River, crossed over via Wait Creek into Goat Creek and then around Tanada Lake to the south. Staying south of the Copper Lake, the trail, known here as the *'Ałts'e' Tnaey* Trail, continues east around the foot of Capital Mountain from where it was a straight run to the Sanford River. The trail then took the curious feature of going up the Sanford River and crossing over to and down the Dadina River. The crossover effectively ended the *'Ałts'e' Tnaey* trail system, however the trail continued in a much more complex pattern radiating out to Paxson Lake, Knik, Eyak, and Cantwell.
>
> It is best to remember that it is more accurate to describe these trails as coming up to meet the Headwaters Trail, even though the halfway point for us was actually down at the Matanuska River (quoted in Simeone 2014, 76–77).

There were three Upper Ahtna bands: the Sanford/Chistochina band, the Slana/Batzulnetas band, and the Mentasta band. Members of these bands now live primarily in Mentasta and Chistochina, or *Cheesh'na*. As of the late nineteenth century, winter villages in the region included *Stl'aa Caegge* (commonly called Slana in English), *Nataełde* (Batzulnetas), *Sasluuggu'* (Suslota), and *Mendaesde* (Mentasta) (Kari 1986; Simeone 2014, 9). Strong (1972) recognized that northern Ahtna formed a recognizable political grouping comprising the above four villages. Reckord (1983b, 193) wrote that the trail system of the upper Copper River "reflects the internal social affiliations of the Suslota and their neighbors" living in these four villages. She notes that all four were closely tied through marriage.

Among the Upper Ahtna there were two inherited *denae* titles: *Stl'aa Caegge Ghaxen* ("Person of the Rear River Mouth") at Slana and *Mendaes Ghaxen* ("Person of Shallows Lake") at Mentasta (Kari 1986, 15). The chief of Slana and Batzulnetas had a territory stretching from the Slana River to the head of the Copper River, including Tanada and Copper lakes. *Stl'aa Caegge Ghaxen* was in charge of the passes across

Figure 4: Upper Ahtna in southwest end of Mentasta Pass, from trail at head of Mentasta Lake. F. C. Schrader Collection, U.S. Geological Survey.

the Mentasta Mountains, and the *Mendaes Ghaxen* controlled the upper Slana and Tok rivers (Kari 1986, 21). These titles were held primarily by men of the *'Ałtsè'tnaey* clan, which was predominant in the upper Copper River area as a whole.

During her childhood and young adulthood, Chistochina elder Ruby Sinyon moved across large swaths of *Tatl'ahwt'aenn* territory – especially the Slana/Batzulnetas area – with her family:

> I born at Tanada Lake. My mother and my dad had split up for a while, and so he went back to his mother and his daddy. That's why I born Tanada Lake.
>
> And right across when we were back the road, that's where we lived for a while. And my grandma die there and my grandpa die at Sislutee [Suslota] – old village, old town.
>
> Then we move everywhere for fish, you know. Come back down to Old Benzeniti [Batzulnetas] for fish. We're livin' there all summer fishin' and we go back up to Chalk Creek – house and cache we had, so we had go back there until my mother, he got right back 1942.
>
> That's when we movin' across the river up Nabesna area. And we start trappin' all down the river, all over down the river. Down someplace, I don't know what they call it. Pickerel Lake and Sheep Creek, over King City, across to Chisana.
>
> We always trappin' down that way 'til wintertime. Then we came back Nabesna and we start movin' around for fish. Come back, old Benzeniti – fish 'em and go back up. In the wintertime, start trappin'.

> And my mother really sick. We don't know what to do. We use plane to send 'em out. No car go down to Old Village. No nothing. Wintertime we use sled.
>
> Then when my mother leave us, he went to hospital, no place to go, we come back Chistochina. We find man to live with 'im (Sinyon 2001; *cf*. Simeone 2014).

Upper Ahtna lands adjoined those of Central Ahtna bands to the west and bordered Upper Tanana and Tanacross groups who lived to the north and east. Some significant cultural, linguxistic and relational differences existed between Upper Ahtna and other Ahtna groups, although the groups became more homogenized during the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Nevertheless, the Upper Ahtna were unique in the amount and importance of the familial, cultural, linguistic, and economic ties they shared with the peoples of the upper Tanana River (Wheeler and Ganley 1991).

Intermarriage between Upper Tanana and Upper Ahtna was frequent. Upper Ahtna from Batzulnetas, Mentasta and Suslota were married into Ketchumstuk, Tanacross, Tetlin and Northway. McKennan (1959, 12) reported that in the winter of 1929–30, four families lived at Cooper Creek, on the upper Nabesna River. These families are the ancestors of the Albert and Frank families of Northway, and of the Sanford and Justin families of Nabesna Bar, Chistochina and Mentasta (Reckord 1983b, 230). Titus John, also known as Scottie Creek Titus, was a shaman or doctor who came from Scottie Creek, located near the present-day Canada-Alaska border. People from the Tanana River valley frequently traveled to the Copper River headwaters during the summer to fish with relatives, while many from the Copper Basin obtained caribou meat by contributing labor to the Ketchumstuk caribou fence (de Laguna and McClellan 1981, 648).

Wilson Justin suggested that clan affiliation, as opposed to Upper Tanana or Ahtna identity, was the most important distinction recognized in these borderlands:

> Karen Brewster [interviewer]: What about connections with Upper Tanana people?
>
> Wilson Justin: Well, there's no such thing as connections. It's kinda like same.
>
> Karen Brewster: Well, I was thinking of trails and trade between.
>
> Wilson Justin: It's like saying what's the connection between south UAF and north UAF. To me it what –
>
> Karen Brewster: I meant the trails and the trade and –
>
> Wilson Justin: They were all part and parcel the same thing. It just depends on which clan was located on what part (Justin 2014).

As Justin suggests here, identities were often very fluid between people who lived near the Upper Tanana–upper Ahtna borderlands. Upper Ahtna bands also had trade connections with the Southern Tutchone in the Kluane Lake area – this region was connected to the Ahtna homeland via a network of trails that led through the White River drainage.

Central Ahtna

Central Ahtna territory includes the expansive, hilly valley of the central Copper River from the Tazlina area up past the Gulkana and Gakona rivers to around Caribou Creek (near the mouth of Indian River). It extends westward toward the Chugach Mountains, eastward to Mt. Wrangell, and northward through

the Gulkana and Gakona River valleys into the eastern Alaska Range and the upper Delta River valley. The Central Ahtna, called *'Atnahwt'aene* ("Copper River people") in their own language, comprised a single, expansive Gulkana/Gakona band, according to de Laguna and McClellan (1981). Many Central Ahtna descendants live in the villages of Copper Center (now called Kluti-Kaah), Tazlina, Gulkana, and Gakona. Others live in Glennallen, the regional hub community in the area. Four *denae* titles were associated with Central Ahtna territory: two at Tazlina Lake, one near Glennallen, and one at the mouth of the Gulkana River (present-day site of Gulkana village).

In the 1970s, Jack Campbell (1971, 7 July) conducted fieldwork among Copper Center residents, describing in his fieldnotes the traditional territorial boundaries of the areas they used:

> South from where the Tazlina meets the Copper along the right bank of the Copper River including Willow Creek to right bank of the Tonsina. It also includes Tonsina Lake and Tonsina Glacier. They did not go to the other side of the Chugach Divide. Their western boundary was the eastern side of Tazlina Glacier and includes Kaina Lake and Creek, St. Anne's Lake and Creek but not Tazlina Lake. The northern part of their "country" is bounded by the Tazlina River.

In an interview with the anthropologists Frederica de Laguna and Marie-Françoise Guédon recorded in 1968, Elsie and Frank Stickwan talked about the hunting territories and trails of the Ahtna who lived at Dry Creek, the mouth of the Tazlina River, and Copper Center. At the end of the interview, Frank Stickwan said that people from different villages sometimes shared a territory.

Figure 5: Frank and Elsie Stickwan and daughters, L-R: Dorothy Locke, Catharine-Carol Stickwan, and Gloria Stickwan, Bible Conference, Copper Center, July 4, 1968. Alaska State Library, Frederica de Laguna Photo Collection, P350-68-3-15.

> Interviewer: Where did Dry Creek [*Latsibese' Cae'e*] people hunt?
>
> Frank Stickwan: They had trail from Dry Creek to Crosswind Lake [*Kaghalk'edi Bene'*], about 30 miles. Then to Tyone Lake [*Hwtsuughe Ben Ce'e*], all the way, that trail. Then trail to Susitna River [*Sasutna'*], Valdez Creek [*C'ilaan Na'*]. All the way to Cantwell [*Yidateni Na'*], I guess, just foot walk trail so wide.
>
> Interviewer: Where did they have caribou fences?
>
> Frank Stickwan: At Crosswind Lake and Tyone Lake. That's where I see, old fence there long ago, at Tyone Lake. All down.
>
> Interviewer: Who built the [caribou] fence at Crosswind Lake?
>
> Frank Stickwan: Old timer – old Jacku [Jacquot]. Lived up at Old Man Lake [*Bendaes Bene'*]. That's him home. Two places he had home. The other was at Ten Mile Lake. He was *kaskae* (de Laguna and Guédon 1968, Box 8.3; 8.17.68).

As the Stickwans mention, the areas around Ewan and Crosswind lakes were important sites for some *'Atnahwt'aene*, especially those associated with the village of Dry Creek, or *Latsibese' Cae'e* ("hand head bank mouth," Kari 2014, 55). Ewan Lake was known as an area where non-salmon fish could be obtained if food became scarce during the winter (West 1973, 30). Western Ahtna at nearby Tyone Lake had close relationships with the families in this area.

Central Ahtna lands included the entire Gulkana and Gakona river drainages. The Gulkana River mouth, a few miles below present-day Gulkana village, was the site of a winter village. Farther up the river, *K'ey Tsaay gha* ("by the small birch," or Hogan Hill; Kari 2014, 61) was also an important village, as was *Bes T'aax* ("beneath the bank;" Kari 2014, 65), the village at Paxson Lake (Reckord 1983b, 163, 166). Bacille George said Paxson Lake was "owned" by the *Udzisyu* clan but they "potlatched" half the lake to the *Naltsiine*, conferring on them the right to hunt caribou as they swam across the lake.

> Gulkana side they give it to *Naltsiine*. Big chief they give it to. Lots of caribou go swimming in the lake. They get lots of money selling the [caribou] skin. That's two of them [clans] belong that lake (de Laguna and Guédon 1968).

The highlands of the upper Gulkana, Gakona, and Delta river drainages were important caribou and moose hunting sites. In an undated interview, Ben Neeley described the system of territories and trails that his family relied on for caribou hunting:

> When I was a child we used to move way out to Sourdough and then up the Gulkana River. Up always and then we got a trail to Tangle Lake. All the way to Tangle Lake and that area where we had complete hunting for the winter. And all the finish hunting gets dried and we start hauling it back partway to the Gulkana River. Make Gulkana River then they built a canoe, skin boat or raft, log raft and then float down and meet back down to where they wanted to meet down here. Used to be. Only hunting area they used to have. That's what my dad and mom and all the family and half the Gulkana village is used to go to the Tangle Lake area. That's 1930 the last hunt we did at the Tangle Lake area (Neeley n.d.).

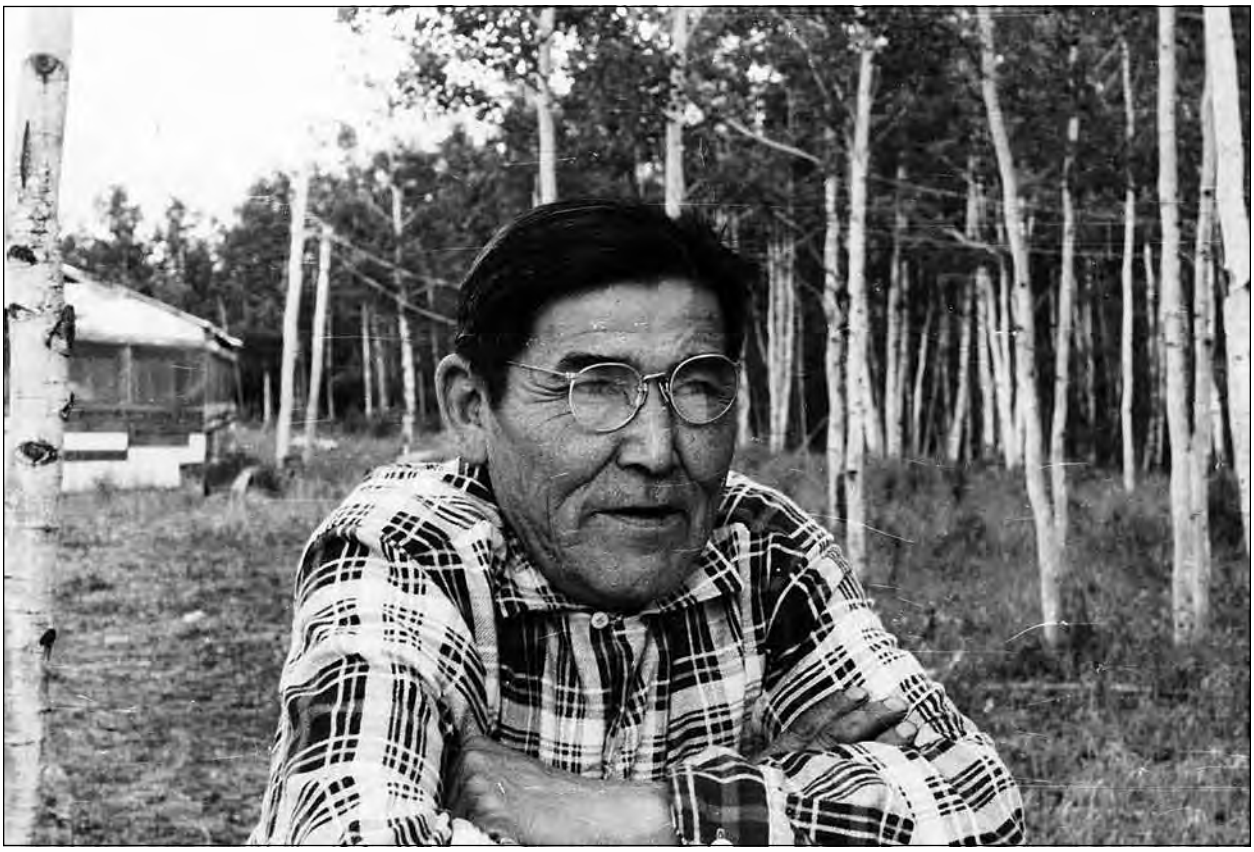


Figure 6: Bacille George at a Bible conference in Copper Center, 1960. Alaska State Library, Frederica de Laguna Photo Collection, P350-68-2-15.

Neeley mentioned that families from the Gulkana area had hunting areas on the West Fork of the Gulkana River. But during the 1930s and 1940s, families gradually stopped living seasonally along the rivers as they settled in Gulkana and Gakona villages.

The lands surrounding Central Ahtna territories were inhabited mainly by other Ahtna groups. However, Central Ahtna still saw visitors from outside the Ahtna homeland, and some of them traveled to places such as Knik for trade. In the Delta and Gulkana river valleys, Central Ahtna lands interfaced with those of the Lower Tanana and Tanacross Dene, forming an important access corridor between the Ahtna homeland and Interior Alaska. There was extensive exchange of goods back and forth through these valleys and marriages that strengthened bonds among Central Ahtna, Tanacross, and Lower Tanana peoples.

Lower Ahtna

Lower Ahtna inhabited most of the Copper River drainage between Miles Lake and near the mouth of the Dadina River, including the entire Chitina River drainage (Kari 2010). Geographically, these lands are dominated by the Chitina River, which divides the Chugach Mountains in the south from the Wrangells in the north. Below the confluence of the Chitina, the mainstem of the Copper River penetrates the Chugach, whose expansive icefields are also the source of the Tonsina, Tiekel and Bremner rivers, as well as most of the smaller tributaries in the region.

Lower Ahtna bands held a majority of the 16 *denae* titles in Ahtna territory. Kari has suggested that the density of chief's titles in Lower Ahtna territory may indicate that the titles were associated with copper production and salmon fishing sites, both of which were especially prevalent in the region (Kari

Figure 7: Chief Nicholai with two wives and "Woodland." Francis E. Pope collection 66-15-723N, Archives, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

1986, 15). This favorable economic position may have also contributed to a greater degree of social stratification among the Lower Ahtna than among other Ahtna groups (*cf*. Reckord 1983b, 49; Pratt 1998, 94).

Four chief's titles were clustered within a stretch of river that is less than ten miles long, between the mouths of the Chitina River and Haley Creek. One chief was located on the Chitina River, with the remaining ones farther upriver along the Copper. Chitina elder Frank Billum (1992) told of three brothers who held three of these titles during the nineteenth century, controlling much of the Chitina River. One of these three brothers was probably Chief Bacille, who held the title of *Taghael Denen*, Chief of Taral. Bacille's successor, Nicolai, became one of the most powerful and well-known chiefs among the Lower Ahtna. He governed much of the Chitina River drainage (Pratt 1998, 87–97). According to Frank Billum (1992):

> See that's why it go, like I told this [unclear] when three brothers gone, and then Nicolai, and then Hanagita, they turned out to be chiefs in Taral. And that's all their area, see, way up, all way up to Kiagna and Kennecott, McCarthy area, years ago.

Farther upriver along the Copper mainstem were the lands of the Tonsina-Klutina band. Although there were several chief's titles in this area, Nicolai's most powerful contemporary was Chief Stickwan, or Conaquanta (Allen 1887), whose winter village was located just downriver from present-day Copper Center (West 1973, 18). Chief Stickwan's influence extended over much of *'Atnahwt'aene* land between the Tonsina River and the Tazlina River.

The Lower Ahtna had direct access to a number of different outside groups. From Taral, one route led down the Copper River to Eyak lands in Prince William Sound. In 1793, the Russians established a trading post at Nuchek, on Hinchinbrook Island, where Ahtna could obtain western goods such as flour, sugar, and salt (Grinev 1993, 56). From 1820 to 1850, they operated a small trading outpost at the mouth of the Chitina River, near Taral. Just west of the Eyak along the coast of Prince William Sound were lands

Figure 8: Chief Stickwan at Copper Center. Geoffrey Bleakley Collection, Makawao, Hawaii, GB-02-02-21.

of the Chugach, with whom the Ahtna had a long history of hostility. Joe Goodlataw, of Chitina, related to de Laguna and McClellan the history of a war that ensued after the "Aleuts" (Chugach) kidnapped two Ahtna women and brought them to Prince William Sound.

> [Answer to question about Aleuts]. I don't like to talk about them. [We] kill about 1500 down there, at Mummy Island. Copper River people came down. Don't tell them [what I say]. They never forget it. If a Copper River boy comes down, and they just gang up on him, the young people. The old folks tell them about it.
>
> [Question as to cause of trouble].
>
> [Answer:] Oh, they [the Aleuts] take two women away from here.
>
> [Q:] Why did they come up?]
>
> [A:] Oh, they always come around up here, snare for squirrels. […]
>
> The Copper River people killed all [the] Aleuts down there. [There used to be lots of people on Mummy Island], but I don't think they had a village after that. [They have] kind of superstition about that place. Nobody never came down near no more (de Laguna and McClellan 1954, Box 5.1, 7.13.54).

Where the lower Copper River provided a direct route to Prince William Sound, the Chitina River valley contained overland access to lands south and east of Ahtna territory (see Chapter 8 for more detail). Lower Ahtna had close relations with the Yakutat Tlingit, whose territory they could access via a route from the Chitina River valley, and over the Bagley Icefield to Cape Yakataga (de Laguna and McClellan 1981, 651). The two groups met and traded annually at the mouth of the Copper River (Pratt 1998, 6). One Lower Ahtna clan, known among the Yakutat Tlingit as *Gineix Kwáan* or *Kwáashk'ik̲wáan*, are said to have migrated to up the Bremner River and over the Bagley Icefield, eventually settling at Yakutat Bay. They controlled the copper sources of the Chitina River and purchased the Yakutat Bay area using copper brought from their homeland. This group gradually became Tlingitized, although their descendants still trace their ancestry to the Copper River (de Laguna 1972, 231–247; Deur et al. 2015, 30–36). This close association between Lower Ahtna and Yakutat Tlingit represents an important link between two different corners of today's Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. Other routes led to Upper Tanana lands near Northway and those of the Southern Tutchone in the White River drainage (see Chapter 8 for more detail).

Lower Ahtna territory included the large, well-known copper deposits of the Chitina River valley. This, combined with their access to neighboring groups, enabled chiefs in the area to accumulate substantial wealth. Each year, typically in the fall months, Ahtna towed skin boats up the river, loaded them with copper, and floated them downriver. As with other economic production, the Chitina River *denae* ostensibly controlled the wealth produced by copper mining (Pratt 1998, 92). However, the activity also gave Lower Ahtna the chance for upward mobility (Reckord 1983a, 25–26) – stories of poor people finding copper and becoming rich are popular in Ahtna folklore. Euro-American tools became more available during the first half of the nineteenth century, gradually displacing the Indigenous copper trade in much of Ahtna territory. In Lower Ahtna territory, copper retained its trade importance until the late nineteenth century (Pratt 1998, 82). As its importance gradually declined, the fur trade expanded and increasingly became a source of Lower Ahtna wealth. At the same time, American business interests penetrated the Chitina River valley, building the Kennecott Mine and an accompanying railway between Cordova and the Chitina valley.

By the early twentieth century, most of the winter villages on the Chitina River had been vacated, with many of their former inhabitants moving into Chitina Village. Seasonal occupation of the Chitina valley declined during the following decades. Today, Chitina is the only organized tribe located on lower Ahtna lands.[4] The communities of Kenny Lake and McCarthy are located in this area, and many people live in scattered houses throughout the road system.

Western Ahtna

Called *Hwtsaay Hwt'aene* ("small timber people") in their own language, the Western Ahtna lived throughout most of the upper Susitna watershed, parts of the upper Matanuska, and in the western fringe of the Copper Basin. Geographically, the Western Ahtna homeland differed from those of the other groups in a few significant ways. As a whole, Ahtna people are closely associated with the Copper River basin (*atna'* being the Indigenous name for the Copper River), yet most Western Ahtna lands were in the Susitna drainage. In fact, Western Ahtna territories did not include the mainstem of the Copper River. Mendeltna was the only salmon-fishing site in the region (Reckord 1983b, 155), although of course *Hwtsaay Hwt'aene* could obtain salmon from Central and Lower Ahtna relatives. Western Ahtna bands often targeted non-salmon fish that lived in the region's abundant lakes (Simeone and Kari 2005). Finally, *Hwtsaay Hwt'aene* were the only Ahtna grouping whose homelands were wholly outside the boundaries of modern-day Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. For this reason, their settlements are absent from our discussion of sites in the park in Chapter 8.

[4] De Laguna and McClellan (1981) considered Lower Ahtna territory to have extended northward to the mouth of the Tazlina River, which would have included the present-day village of Kluti-Kaah (Copper Center). But Kari (2010) considers the area near the Dadina River mouth to have been the dividing line between Lower Ahtna and Central Ahtna, based on his linguistic studies. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, Ahtna themselves did not traditionally distinguish between Lower and Central Ahtna, but had a single term (*Atnahwt'aene*) that encompassed people of both areas.

In an interview with Lincoln Smith, Morrie Secondchief (1993) described the families who lived at Tyone Lake in the early twentieth century:

> Lincoln Smith: Who hunted in here? Nam-, can you name any of the families or where did they come from?
>
> Morrie Secondchief: Uh, ch-, mostly m- Chief Tyone's father, Chief Tyone's father and all his brother. There was four of them, Chief Tyone, Old Black Joe and all of them. And each one had father.
>
> LS: Mmm hmm.
>
> MS: And that is *Talchina* [*taltsiine*] all *Talchina*.
>
> LS: Hmm.
>
> MS: Chief Tyone is *Tsisyu*.
>
> LS: Oh.
>
> MS: So like I [sic] said, Chief Tyone's father was living around Tyone Lake and that mountain up there, up there where they…
>
> LS: Right there's a cemetery on that hill isn't there?
>
> MS: Yeah, up there. That's where they live, around there, four of them. They never go no place.

In contrast with other Ahtna regional groupings, Reckord (1983b, 76) states that many Western Ahtna bands had settlements on the shores of large lakes, with hunting camps, fishing sites, and primary winter villages all located near each other. This differs from the typical pattern found elsewhere in the region (described above), where seasonal sites occupy different ecozones, and are thus spread across much larger areas.

The only inherited *denae* title in Western Ahtna area is *Sałtigi ghaxen* ("person of Sałtigi") at Tyone Lake, and Ahtna from elsewhere in the *Hwtsaay Hwt'aene* homeland trace their lineage to the Tyone-Mendeltna band of this area. In the early nineteenth century, Lower Tanana Dene inhabited most of the Upper Susitna drainage. Ahtna from Tyone Lake and *Nilben Caek'e*, a village located at the confluence of the Tyone and Susitna rivers, challenged and defeated the Lower Tanana in warfare (URS Alaska, LLC 2014, 26–28). Victorious Ahtna moved north to occupy these areas of the upper Susitna and upper Nenana River valleys. Some ethnographers have referred to this group as the Cantwell-Denali band (de Laguna and McClellan 1981). After a gold mine opened at Valdez Creek in 1903, most members of the Cantwell-Denali band relocated to the nearby community of Denali during the following few decades. Ahtna at Valdez Creek lived in close proximity to the white community there, but as Reckord noted:

> Denali was actually two separate cultural communities living side by side. There was the Native community composed of families who had a long-term commitment to the area, and the mining community composed of single men who held short-term commitments to the area (Reckord 1983b, 175).

Contact between the two groups, Ahtna engagement in the mining, and their combined participation in cash economies launched a period of rapid culture change. As mining activity died down in the 1930s, descendants of the Cantwell-Denali band gradually relocated to the modern village of Cantwell, where many of their descendants live today.

In addition to the Tyone-Mendeltna and Cantwell-Denali bands, the upper Talkeetna River is home to the *Dghelaay Tahwt'aena*, or "mountain people," comprised of mixed Ahtna and Dena'ina speakers who shared some lands with the Cantwell-Denali Ahtna (URS Alaska LLC 2014, 15). In the early twentieth century, a number of Ahtna families from various locations moved to the mining community of Chickaloon at the confluence of the Matanuska and Chickaloon rivers. Their descendants now live in Chickaloon, Sutton, and communities along the Glenn Highway (de Laguna and McClellan 1981, 642; Kari and Fall 2003).

In contemporary times, communities in the *Hwtsaay Hwt'aene* traditional-use area include Cantwell and Chickaloon, as well as the nonnative settlements of Healy and McKinley Park, and a scattering of homes along the Glenn and Parks highways. However, the majority of Western Ahtna lands are not on the road system and no longer have permanent or even seasonal occupants. Many Western Ahtna, particularly those of the Tyone-Mendeltna band, settled in villages such as Gulkana and Copper Center during the mid-twentieth century.

TRAILS AND TRAVEL ROUTES

Different types of trails can be described based on their particular use. Trails used for commerce connected the Ahtna homeland with the territories of other Native peoples who traded with the Ahtna: Tlingit, Upper Tanana, Dena'ina, and Tutchone. Along these trails people moved furs, copper, tanned skins, dried salmon, and other products. Such trails were controlled by a *denae* and used only with their permission. Jim Tyone described what he called "big trail" or *ba' zes*, indicating it was a trail used to move dried fish or *ba'*. Big trails were also used to move fur, or *desnen' koley*, translated as "that which has no paternal relatives." As Tyone (1981) explained:

> There's all these big trail. *Ba' zes* they call it. They used to be pack, everything he use. Skin, everything, his clothes.
>
> *Yu' ghenaa desnen' koley, desnen' koley* what they call.
>
> /For clothing they used furs "ones with no relatives"
>
> Skin *'uze' desnen' koley dae' kiidił'a'*. You heard that? *desnen' koley*? Skin.
>
> /the name for furs is "ones with no paternal relatives."

As transportation corridors, "big trails" provided a conduit for Ahtna bands to have social and economic exchange within and beyond their home territories and they played central roles in maintaining their economic and political systems. Reckord (1983a, 39-40) described how *denae* who lived near the edges of the Copper River valley were able to accumulate wealth and fancy European trade-goods because they controlled the trails leading outside to Cook Inlet and Prince William Sound.

Interregional trails linked different parts of Ahtna territory and were owned or controlled by specific clans. From the Copper River, the Ahtna trail system led to all of the major lakes including Tonsina, Klutina, Tazlina, Crosswind, Ewan, Tyone, Tanada, and Copper lakes (Kari and Tuttle 2005). James Sinyon (1973) described the foot trails extending up the Gulkana River drainage:

[Question:] Do you know where any old foot trails are?

[Answer:] Yeah, there's one foot trail from Ewan Lake where up to that Tangle Lakes [*Saen Tene*], going up all the way through, out into Sourdough country.

Another foot trail right from Gulkana village over to Hogan Hill. Up around there to Paxson Lake up in that country there.

[Q:] Do you know who used em?

[A:] Yea they all do.

Figure 9: Denali Trail, 1941. Alaska State Library, Butler/Dale Photo Collection, P306-088X.

> [Oscar] Ewan's father there were four brothers, used to be. They own that country and the trails. Seems that there where two places where they go up that way. Some of them were caches.
>
> [Q:] How long ago was that?
>
> [A:] That's back, well first time I see that trail was 1905. It was game trail, same place was foot trail. We went on that trail right from Gulkana way to Paxson and Tangle Lakes.

As Sinyon suggests, these trails were also owned by particular *denae*, who frequently formed agreements to let members of other bands use them.

Trails also linked fish camps to winter houses, caches, lakeside camps, and hunting areas. These trails were integral to the system of territories, in that Ahtna bands asserted their rights over particular lands largely through continuous use and occupation. Linguist James Kari, who has extensively documented descriptions of travel routes throughout the region by elders who were alive in the early twentieth century, has noted that when Ahtna elders describe travel routes, they commonly state the boundaries of the areas that they have visited personally (Kari and Fall 2003, 4).

Figure 10: Frame of a sweathouse at a fish-camp on the bank of the Chistochina River, 1954. Alaska State Library, Frederica de Laguna Photo Collection, P350-54-11-16.

Wilson Justin (2014) suggests that the trail-access agreements between families played an important role in the redistribution of resources through access to the land in times of shortage:

> You also have to know things like where the trails go and who's – own the trail. You might have three hundred miles of trail, and you might have eight families share the trail.

> Where the families overlap, crossover places, it's very important to know that. Because the brother-in-law's of each families – there might be eight brother-in-law entangled in that three hundred miles that are going to be representing their family interests in terms – in times of shortage or in times where the caribou don't come through or the fish don't come up or the moose don't show up.
>
> There has to be some way to balance the resource sharing in that stretch of trail among the families who have legitimate right to it. It be like a bank failure. Everybody gets something, but you might only get ten cents on the dollar. But nobody's gonna go without.

In addition to their highly sophisticated geographic naming system, discussed below, Ahtna also had a complex set of signs and symbols that they used to communicate information about their movements. According to Addison Powell (1909, 286–87), departing travelers would commonly leave sticks at their camps pointing in the direction of their travel and basic information about the travelers, for persons arriving later to interpret. They also communicated travel routes using a system of pictographic symbols that they would draw onto bark or other smooth surfaces.

Figure 11: Hunting camp of [Ahtna], head of Delta River, Alaska, 1898. Walter C. Mendenhall Collection, U.S. Geological Survey.

Some of the contemporary roads in the Ahtna homeland have followed, or evolved from, ancient trails and travel routes. Walya Hobson told Reckord (1983b, 165) that the Richardson Highway followed the route of a summer footpath between Gulkana and Paxson. Similarly, Ahtna and Lower Tanana Dene men who worked on the crew that established the route for the Denali Highway during World War II followed established travel routes in the area.

PLACE NAMES AND AHTNA GEOGRAPHIC KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS

The Ahtna language conveys the significance of place, reflecting close connection to the land. The word for a person or people is *koht'aene*, literally translated as "those who have a territory." The name of each regional band combines a place name with the word *hwt'aene* indicating "people of a place or people who possess an area." So, for example, Lower and Central Ahtna are *'Atnahwt'aene*, glossed as "people of the Copper River." Upper Ahtna are *tatl'aht'aene,* or "headwaters people" and Western Ahtna are *Hwtsaay Hwt'aene* or "small timber people." Another example are the chief's titles mentioned earlier. The word *denen* or *ghax* is combined with a place name to produce a title such as *Hwt'aa cae'e denen* or "chief of Fox Creek." A *denae* can also be referred to as *nen'k'e hwdenae'* translated as "on the land person," or as Ahtna elder Annie Ewan put it "men who lived and died in a particular place" (de Laguna and McClellan 1960, Box 7.4, 8.4.60). Thus, a *denae* would be recognized not only as an important person, but as an important person of a particular place.

Place names conveyed important information about Ahtna territory. Not only did they often describe physical geography, but some also described travel routes or denoted social/political structures – for example, marking territorial boundaries (Kari and Tuttle 2005, 14–15). Many also conveyed information indirectly, through associated histories, beliefs, etc. Place names have been documented even for relatively minor features, and many have undoubtedly been lost in areas such as the Chitina River drainage, where Ahtna occupancy of many lands had declined considerably by the early twentieth century (Simeone n.d.).

The Ahtna geographic naming system was systematized, with a variety of structural and formal features (Kari and Tuttle 2005; Kari 2010, 129–40). For example, Ahtna and other Northern Dene use rivers as absolute landmarks. That is, instead of compass directions, Dene use a major river as the fixed point when referring to other locations. A location is either upstream or downstream or upland from the riverbank. For Ahtna living within the Copper River basin, the Copper River is an absolute landmark: it is the fixed reference point from which to locate other landmarks. For Western Ahtna, the Susitna and Nenana rivers are absolute landmarks (Kari 2010, 129).

Repetitive sets of similar place names were sometimes used for sequences of locations within a particular area (e.g., Kari 2010, 79–80). Similarly, repetitive place names were sometimes used to mark the beginnings and ends of particular travel routes (Kari 1986). Simeone and Kari (2002, 22) stated that, "Generally speaking the Ahtna place name system emphasizes linear features, especially streams and ridge lines, while it de-emphasizes minor landforms, cultural features, and high country." Kari pointed to the low density of human habitation as a reason why some geographic features (e.g., sloughs) are not always named: "Given that the Alaska Athabascan population was small and the band territories so large, an even, low-density distribution of place names is maximally practical and functional" (Kari 2008, 251).

Unsurprisingly, patterns of place names, and Ahtna knowledge of them, reflect the patterns of traditional use in the Ahtna homeland. Place names sometimes referenced fish, animals, or plants that could be found in those areas. For example, the place name for Suslota Creek/Lake (*Sasluuggu' Na' /Mene'* from *sasluugu'*, "sand sockeye") refers to characteristics of the salmon that spawn in the creek or lake. Specific areas that were important for fishing and other subsistence activities tended to have high densities of place names (Simeone and Kari 2002, 40). Among elders with lifetimes of experience on traditional Ahtna travel routes, knowledge of place names was most concentrated in their home territories, although Kari (1986) says that experienced travelers may have detailed knowledge of up to four band territories. While giving a detailed account of his own territories in the Brushkana-Cantwell area, Jake Tansy expressed his lack of knowledge of place names on neighboring Dena'ina lands:

> **Gaani Yea Yidateni Caek'e 'utsiit, gaani[3] du' Hwni'dilaex Na',**
> /here is Jack River mouth to the lowlands, there is 'fish run to a place creek' (Cantwell Creek).

> Little Cantwell, I think Hwni'dilaex Caek'e where it run into that Yidateni.
> /at Little Cantwell is the mouth of "fish run to a place mouth", where that runs into Jack River.
>
> Yidateni is the main name you know. Hwni'dilaex Na' Caek'e, and Kantistaan Caek'e Little Windy. B-L down that way. That's reason I don't know the name.
>
> I think from Hwni'dilaex to the other way. Eklutna people I guess they know the name. [Summit]
>
> You know that Shem Sam Pete he know every one of them [names].
>
> Sam Pete he told me he's my cousin, *scele*[5] that's what he told me. He was pretty way older than me, Me I don't know much. Eklutna people, *sunghae nlaen*.
>
> Same way that Copper Center, down Chitina. Some of them my cousin. Me I don't know (Kari n.d., 46–47).

Similarly, Tenas Charley told de Laguna and McClellan (1960, Box 7.2, 7.9.60): "This way, my country. Tonsina Lake. This way, all kinds of mountains. I know what they call them. Over there that way, I don't know."

Dialectical differences within the language also marked people within Ahtna territory and even played a large role in defining who was, or was not, Ahtna. Bacille George said that "Batzulnetas talk like Chistochina now, but in the old days they talked like Tetlin, Nabesna and Batzulnetas talk the same way. Gulkana and Chistochina talk the same but language changes when you get to Batzulnetas, Chisana talks like Batzulnetas as does Tanacross" (de Laguna and McClellan 1954, Box 5.2, 7.25.54).

COSMOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF AHTNA GEOGRAPHY

Because Ahtna culture was shaped through intensive, continuous interaction with the land, spiritual beliefs reflected the particularities of the places in which the Ahtna lived and traveled. Jim McKinley told de Laguna and McClellan (1958, Box 6.4, 8.16.58) about one place with unique stones, which were understood to be the work of *Saghani Ggaay* (Raven-creator): "Ten miles up the Klutina river there are stones like dolls. Built like dolls. Round – like the heads [of dolls]. They are pretty – all round. There are little small ones. When I was a boy, I believe it (that [*Saghani Ggaay*] made such things)."[6]

Traditional Ahtna cosmology does not recognize the categorical difference between mind (or spirit) and matter that is implicit in most western systems of knowledge and belief. Unlike western paradigms, in which empirical observations and supernatural beliefs are supposed to occupy separate domains, Indigenous Ahtna knowledge systems functioned as a fluid whole, in which "supernatural" beliefs and on-the-ground sensory perception were in constant interaction and could not be separated from each other (see Chapter 5 for more detail).

Even while the work of spiritual forces was seen throughout the landscape, some sites held special sanctity among the pre-colonial Ahtna. Kari and Tuttle (2005, 25–26) have described nine different types of sacred places. Some of these were sanctified in a marked way, or even distant from the realm of direct, everyday experience. The souls of the departed manifested themselves as the smoke coming from the top of Mt. Wrangell. Each traveler venturing into the Matanuska River drainage brought a handful of soil from home to leave at *Nekets'alyaexden*, or Tahneda Pass, where they prayed for safe travel. A mystical reverence surrounded the sites from which clans were to have believed to have originated.

[5] *Scele*, or *cele* (Kari 1990) is an Ahtna word meaning "younger brother."

[6] McKinley's comment, "when I was a boy, I believe it," may reflect the heavy influence of Christianity on Ahtna belief systems, beginning in the early-to-mid-twentieth century. See Chapter 7.

However, Kari's and Tuttle's list of sacred sites also includes places in which Ahtna engaged in everyday life and economic activities. Ancient settlements such as Taral held spiritual significance, as did the nearby hills associated with most winter villages. These are sometimes referred to as the "chief's face" or "grandfather's face" (de Laguna and McClellan 1981, 644). Elizabeth and Mentasta Pete (de Laguna and McClellan 1960, Box 7.4, 8.4.60), for example, said Mentasta has a hill located right across the lake from the current village. This hill is now "owned" by *Alts'e'tnaey*, the clan of Katie John, her children, and Frank Sanford, but a long time ago it belonged to the *T'ca,ze* and *Cela'yu* clans. Fred John Sr. put it this way:

> **Mendaes Dzele'su netsiye' iinn k'etl'aat.**
> /Shallow Lake Mountain (Mentasta Mountain) is what remains of our grandfathers.
>
> **Ut'aax ts'en' k'addi ts'edelts'ii.**
> /Now we stay beneath it.
>
> **Netsehne yen 'iinn su nekaskae' xeyighil'aen'.**
> /Our ancestors had it as their chief.
>
> **Nekaek'ae tah yidi k'e xu nt'aey.**
> /It is the same as our home.
>
> **Mendaes Dzele' su xona c'aadze' iinn kaskae it'aax ts'en' ghida' ts'en'.**
> /A chief of the opposite clan stayed beneath Mentasta Mountain.
>
> **K'adii ut'aax ts'edelts'ii.**
> /Now we live beneath it.
>
> **Yii'c'a xona nekaskae' nlaen.**
> /It, then, is our chief.
>
> **Xona yii gha c'a yet dsel dae'koniix.**
> /This, then, is what we say about this mountain.
> Kari (1986)

Spiritual reverence was also extended to places connected to activities such as copper mining and salmon fishing. The mystical *bac'its'aadi* (salmon boy) story implored Ahtna to treat salmon properly so that they would return (Simeone and Kari 2002, 152–63). This included keeping their fish camps in a way that was pleasing to the salmon. Although less tied to fixed, perennial locations than fishing, it is worth noting hunting and trapping usually required even stricter observance of *'engii* – the Ahtna system of taboos and proscriptions[7] – than did fishing (de Laguna 1969–70; Simeone and Kari 2002). In all instances, making a living from the landscape required Ahtna to be continually mindful of how they were interacting with the places and persons (both human and nonhuman) with whom they came into contact. Each of these interactions was governed by an elaborate set of rules that they began learning in early childhood. In conceptualizing the worldview of Evenki in northern Siberia, David Anderson (2000, 116) outlined a "sentient ecology," in which "hunters act and move on the tundra in such a way that they are conscious that animals and the tundra itself are reacting to them." Likewise, the geography of the Ahtna was one whose places were imbued with life and demanding of respect.

[7] '*Engii* is a complex concept that is discussed more fully in the "Moral Training" section of Chapter 4.

Physical terrain on the landscape was often understood to extend beyond the sensory realm. In his rememberance of Upper Tanana elder *Nelnah*, or Bessie John, Norm Easton (2001, 206–207) described "trails of heaven," which parallel and intersect with earthly trails. Together, these two kinds of trails are spaces of interaction between all kinds of being and spirits:

> [Bessie John] taught me that though we may know where a trail might lead us if we follow it, we cannot predict who or what we might meet along a trail we set out on, or how these encounters might change us—for good or ill—or even whether we will continue along the trail set out upon, or turn off in another direction. Everything depends on an awareness and interaction with whom we meet or what we witness along the trails we walk.
>
> And above these earthly trails are other, more ephemeral ones, the trails of heaven, which are walked by our ancestors and the animal spirits. Sometimes the two kinds of trails intersect, a moment when the extraordinary might occur. You have to cultivate a keen physical awareness to follow a trail safely on earth, and a second, well developed, spiritual awareness to meet the trails from heaven.
>
> "The world is like a spider's web," Bessie once explained to me. "Everything is connected. But you can't always see it. Sometimes you walk right into it without knowing, and you break things apart. You got to look ahead of you, look to see what's coming, and pick your trail to keep things together."

The journeys of sleep doctors (shamans) revealed another kind of spiritual connection with physical geography. In their sleep, Ahtna shamans were known to wander throughout the Ahtna homeland and beyond. Sometimes they would become very hungry and might unintentionally devour the soul of a person living in another village, whose death would soon follow (de Laguna and McClellan 1981, 661).

Sleep doctors' activities could leave landscapes spiritually charged in ways that persisted long after they themselves have died. These places can then have a potency that can restrict or proscribe non-shamans from them, as Chistochina elder Wilson Justin (2014) described:

> I told your predecessor at the national park. They asked me back in the '80s, "How come there's nobody on the land from Twin Lakes to the border?" I said, "Isn't it obvious? It's medicine man country." Nobody's gonna go back in there.
>
> And you don't know where they're buried. You don't know what songs that you need to walk the trails. You have no idea what places that are set aside where –
>
> Over on the other side of Cooper Creek Pass, I came through there with a horse in 1969. Lost a horse, went over the pass, went back and got him.
>
> I found two triangle-shaped multicolored rocks about two hundred yards apart. Very easy to see on the side of the creek.
>
> So I talked to my older half-brother, Jack. He said, "That that was your uncle, Chisana Joe. That's where he make his medicine. You're not supposed to know that place."

Describing another such area in the Matanuska drainage, Justin (2014) concluded: "So that country is full of that kind of stuff, and nobody's going to wander around without the proper permission or consent."

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The traditional homeland of the Ahtna encompasses nearly the entire Copper River basin, as well as much of the upper Susitna River basin and parts of the upper Tanana drainage.

Different groups of Ahtna, each associated with a specific Ahtna clan and *denae* (chief), had their own individual territories throughout which they lived, traveled, and harvested seasonally available resources. Each of these territories covered vast tracts of taiga, tundra, rivers, and lakes. Their large size was necessary for making a living from a landscape in which food and other resources were sparse and available only seasonally. Outsiders visiting other people's territories were expected to get permission before traveling onto them, especially when they were there for the purpose of harvesting food or other resources. Although territorial boundaries were somewhat fluid, they were also protected through the use of force. As a way of organizing political and economic life within the Ahtna traditional-use area, territories will be further discussed in the following chapters.

Sophisticated cultural and geographic systems facilitated Ahtna use of lands of the upper Copper and Susitna River basins. In addition to territoriality and land tenure, Ahtna institutions included an intricate naming system that communicated important information about geographic place names. Ahtna language, in general, connects heavily with concepts of place, indicating the heavy historical Ahtna dependence on the land. Ahtna reckoning of geography was very different from that associated with modern, western societies. Cosmological dimensions of the Ahtna worldview were tightly integrated with all aspects of life and were embedded within the landscape.

Ahtna notions of geography, the landscape, and territoriality began to change drastically in the early twentieth century with the dramatic influx of Euro-American outsiders, and the expansion of the colonial US government, into the Ahtna homeland. What had once been clan territories, associated with *denae*, became more individualized and associated with trapping.

Many facets of Ahtna traditional culture, discussed in the following chapters, undoubtedly evolved in response to some of the basic facts of Ahtna geography. Much of the Ahtna economy (Chapter 3), for instance, revolved around the natural resources that were available in the Ahtna traditional use area. Within this broader homeland, each clan territory had its own economy based on the resources available there. Ahtna notions of geography and territoriality have much in common with those of other northern Indigenous groups – especially neighboring Northern Dene, such as the Upper Tanana, while also sharing a similar climate and boreal forest environment. That said, geographic variation cannot explain all the differences among cultural groups in the area. Rather, the historical Ahtna should be understood as agents who played an active role in engaging with and shaping their relationship to the landscape.

CHAPTER 3: ECONOMY

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the Ahtna economy during the last part of the nineteenth century and discusses changes that occurred in the twentieth century after people began settling in permanent communities. Our discussion focuses on the annual cycle or seasonal round of harvest activities and assesses the influences of western contact on the traditional economy.

At the end of the nineteenth century, Ahtna were hunters and gatherers who moved seasonally throughout the year within reasonably well-defined territories to harvest fish, wildlife, and other renewable resources. Keenly attuned to their environment, small family groups closely monitored weather patterns and animal movements to carefully plan and organize activities so that each species was used at times likely to produce an efficient, abundant, and reliable source of food.

Ahtna constantly looked for food and always prepared for periods of food shortage and possible starvation. Animals were a constant preoccupation: people had to know animals. This meant not only knowing their habits, but being aware of them as unpredictable and powerful beings. Key species relied on for food, such as caribou and salmon, were available for short periods at certain times of the year. Failure to secure a surplus at these optimal times jeopardized the food security of the band during the long winter and early spring months when critical resources usually were scarce or unavailable.

FLORA AND FAUNA

Animal, fish, bird, and plant species found in the Ahtna region, listed in Tables 1, 2 and 3, are typical of those found throughout the subarctic boreal forest. Because the abundance and availability of some resources fluctuated greatly from year to year, Ahtna relied to varying degrees on a wide range of resources for food, fuel, clothing, tools, and shelter. Even then, and despite their intimate knowledge of the environment, food shortages were not uncommon. Although the boreal forest hosts an array of plants and animals, some resources are cyclical, fluctuate in their availability, and can be both abundant and unpredictable.

Of all the species listed in Table 1, salmon and caribou often could be harvested in the greatest quantities. However, any of these species could be scarce during a particular year if they had altered their migration pattern or been impacted by inclement weather or disease. Usually, Ahtna could compensate for a shortage of one food source by increasing their harvests of another. However, a shortage of multiple species during the same year could result in severe food shortage or even starvation – a common theme in Northern Dene literature and oral history.

Three of the five salmon species in the eastern Pacific spawn in tributaries of the Copper River: Chinook (king), sockeye (red), and coho (silver). Sockeye are the most abundant, constituting one of the primary food sources for most nineteenth-century Ahtna. One estimate of the amount of salmon consumed on an annual basis, in the pre-colonial period, by 1,100 Ahtna, is 436,150 fish or 1,308,450 pounds (Simeone and Kari 2002, 59–61). Harvest estimates in the twentieth century are much lower. In part, this is because many Ahtna died due to disease during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, so the population was reduced for a long time.

Large land mammals hunted by Ahtna included caribou, Dall sheep, mountain goats, and moose. In the nineteenth century, caribou were more important than moose, which did not become abundant until the 1920s and 1930s. The Nelchina and Mentasta caribou herds have a large part of their range within the Copper River basin. The Nelchina Herd, composed of the smaller barren-ground caribou common in much of Alaska, ranges in the western part of the Ahtna homeland, the Talkeetna Mountains, the Gulkana River valley, and the western edge of present-day Wrangell-St. Elias. The Mentasta Herd inhabits the upper Copper and Tanana River valleys, between the Delta Mountains (eastern Alaska Range) and the northern Wrangell Mountains. A third herd, the Chisana Herd, has most of its migration routes within the Tanana

Table 1: Fish and mammals used by the Ahtna

FISH		
Common Name	**Scientific Name**	**Ahtna Name**
Arctic grayling	*Thymallus arcticus*	sde't'aeni/segele
Broad whitefish	*Coregonus nasus*	tsabaey ce'e
Burbot/lingcod	*Lota lota*	ts'anyae/ts'aann
Chinook/king salmon	*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*	łuk'ece'e
Coho/silver salmon	*Oncorhynchus kisutch*	xay luugge'
Dolly Varden	*Salvelinus malma*	ts'engastlaeggi/dghalk'aazi
Humpback whitefish	*Coregonus pidschian*	łuux
Lake trout	*Salvelinus namaycush*	baet
Least cisco	*Coregonus sardinella*	xaal ggaay
Longnose sucker	*Catostomus catostomus*	dahts'adye/tahts'aidye/tats'ade
Round whitefish	*Prosopium cylindraceum*	xasten'
Sockeye/red salmon	*Oncorhynchus nerka*	łuk'ae
Steelhead	*Oncorhynchus mykiss*	dadzeł̨i
Rainbow trout	*Oncorhynchus mykiss*	tsabaey/t'aan'delk'esi
MAMMALS		
Common Name	**Scientific Name**	**Ahtna Name**
Arctic ground squirrel	*Spermophilus parryi*	tseles
Beaver	*Castor canadensis*	tsa'
Black bear	*Ursus americanus*	nel'ii
Caribou	*Rangifer tarandus*	udzih
Dall sheep	*Ovis dalli*	debae
Mountain goat	*Oreamnos americanus*	sbaay
Grizzly bear	*Ursus arctos*	tsaani
Moose	*Alces alces*	Alces alces
Marmot	*Marmota caligata*	kuyxi
Lynx	*Lynx canadensis*	niduuy
Marten	*Martes americana*	tsuugi
Mink	*Mustela vison*	tehts'uuts'i
Muskrat	*Ondatra zibethicus*	dzen
Porcupine	*Erethizon dorsatum*	nuuni
Red fox	*Vulpes vulpes*	nunyeggaay
Red squirrel	*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*	delduudi
River (land) otter	*Lutra canadensis*	tahwt'aey
Snowshoe hare	*Lepus americanus*	ggax
Weasel	*Mustela nivalis*	ceghaznae
Wolf	*Canis lupus*	tikaani
Wolverine	*Gulo gulo*	nałtsiis

Table 2: Selected plants and fungi used by the Ahtna

TREES		
Common Name	**Scientific Name**	**Ahtna Name**
Black spruce	*Picea mariana*	tatsaaye'
Paper birch	*Betula papyrifera*	k'ey
Willow	*Salix spp.*	k'ay'
Cottonwood	*Populus balsamifera (balsam poplar), Populus trichocarpa (black cottonwood)*	t'aghes
Tamarack (American larch)	*Larix laricina*	łet'aes
White spruce	*Picea glauca*	ts'abaeli
Sitka alder	*Alnus alnobetula*	kon'k'aye'
PLANTS		
Common Name	**Scientific Name**	**Ahtna Name**
Alpine bearberry	*Arctostaphylos alpine*	dziidzi naegge'
Bog blueberry (Alpine blueberry)	*Vaccinium uliginosum*	gigi gheli
Bunchberry	*Cornus canadensis*	saghani gige'
Highbush blueberry (blue huckleberry)	*Vaccinium ovalifolium*	tl'asts'eni
Lowbush cranberry (lingonberry)	*Vaccinium vitis-idaea*	ntl'et
Bog cranberry	*Oxycoccus microcarpus*	nełtaedzi
Crowberry/blackberry	*Empetrum nigrum*	giznae
Currant	*Ribes spp.*	gigi ntsen/ nantnuuy
Fireweed	*Epilobium angustifolium*	tl'ac'usk'a'
Highbush cranberry	*Viburnum edule*	tsanłtsaey
Indian potato	*Hedysarum alpinum*	tsaas
Juniper berry	*Juniperis communis*	dzeł gige'
Soapberry	*Shepherdia canadensis*	sos gige'
Silverberry	*Elaeagnus commutata*	den gige'
Labrador/Hudson Bay tea	*Ledum groenlandicum*	laduudze'
"Muskrat cache"/"roots"	*Myriophyllum spicatum*	nehts'iil t'aann'
Nagoonberry	*Rubus arcticus*	dahts'enkaadle'
Raspberry	*Rubus idaeus*	den'oggo'
Prickly rose	*Rosa acicularis*	tsinghłt'aeni
Cloudberry (lowbush salmonberry)	*Rubus chamaemorus*	nkaał cogh
Wild rhubarb/sour dock	*Polyganum alaskanum*	ts'igguuze'
Yarrow	*Achillea borealis*	utsit'ahwdelggeyi
Wormwood (stinkweed)	*Artemisia spp.*	tl'ogh tsen
FUNGI		
Common Name	**Scientific Name**	**Ahtna Name**
King bolete ("birch mushroom")	*Boletus spp.*	k'ey ney'
Orange bolete ("cottonwood mushroom")	*Boletus aurantiosplendens*	t'aghhes ney'

Table 3: Migratory and upland birds used by the Ahtna

MIGRATORY BIRDS		
Common Name	**Scientific Name**	**Ahtna Name**
American wigeon	*Mareca americana*	sahsiin
Bufflehead	*Bucephala albeola*	kaskae utse'e
Canada goose	*Branta canadensis*	Xax
Canvasback	*Aythya valisineria*	Ndzeli
Common goldeneye	*Bucephala clangula*	kaskae utse'e
Greater scaup	*Aythya marila*	tsitk'aani
Greater white-fronted goose	*Anser albifrons*	daghedi
Green-winged teal	*Anas crecca*	tsos
Lesser scaup	*Aythya affinis*	naltsoghi
Mallard	*Anas platyrhynchos*	kedeltsiigi
Northern pintail	*Anas acuta*	dzehnaezi/sehnezi/sahnaezi
Long-tailed duck	*Clangula hyemalis*	ah'ala'
Sandhill crane	*Grus canadensis*	daeł
Snow goose	*Chen caerulescens*	ts'enlazeni
Tundra swan	*Cygnus columbianus*	nalt'uuy
Trumpeter swan	*Cygnus spp.*	kaggos
White-winged scoter	*Melanitta fusca*	tatsaan' 'eli/tatsaan'leh
UPLAND GAME BIRDS		
Ruffed grouse	*Bonasa umbellus*	tsaan'
Sharp-tailed grouse	*Tympanuchus phasianellus*	celtagi
Spruce grouse	*Dendragapus canadensis*	deyh
Willow ptarmigan	*Lagopus lagopus*	lacbeh

Tables 1, 2 and 3 are based on the authors' knowledge, ADF&G technical papers such as La Vine et al. (2013), and Kari's (1990) *Ahtna Athabaskan Dictionary.*

and White River basins, but also migrates onto the periphery of Upper Ahtna lands. Unsurprisingly, Upper Ahtna relied more heavily on the Mentasta and Chisana herds, while Central and Western Ahtna had greater access to Nelchina caribou. Caribou were less important for the Lower Ahtna, such as those of the Chitina River area, as they did not have a herd that regularly ranged through their territories (Simeone 2006, 3–12).

Dall sheep were hunted extensively throughout all the mountain ranges in the Ahtna homeland. It appears sheep were plentiful. Lieutenant Allen (1887, 53, 57) reported being fed sheep meat at various locations, and many Ahtna elders report spending the late summer and fall hunting sheep. (See, for example, Adam Sanford's narrative about hunting on the upper Sanford River in Kari 1986, 161). While in the mountains during the late summer and fall, Ahtna also hunted ground squirrels and marmot. As well, they relied heavily on hare and porcupine.

Harvested between July and September, berries were highly prized as a food source among the Ahtna, while trees and plants provided food, medicine, and material for infrastructure that touched all aspects of their lives. Wood and bark provided raw materials for winter houses. Birch bark was used to make baskets in which fish, berries, and other foods were stored, while willow branches and spruce roots were used for fish weirs and nets (de Laguna and McClellan 1981). Cottonwood and alder were favored for smoking fish and meat. Various tree species have medicinal properties, as well: spruce sap was applied to burns, cuts, and sores, while its inner bark and needles could be made into medicinal teas. Taiga and tundra plants were also medicinally and gastronomically important. The Ahtna harvested sourdock,

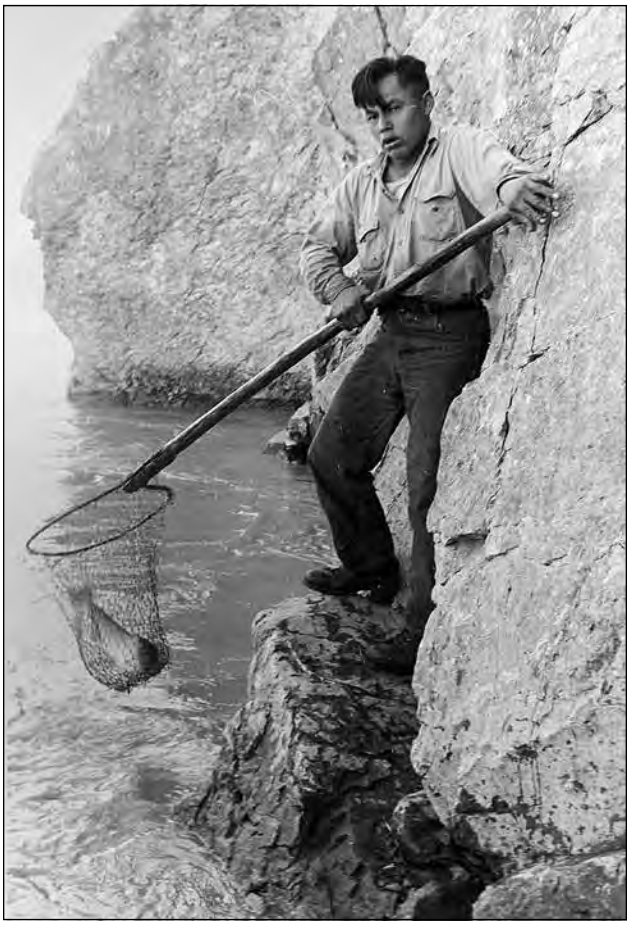


Figure 12: Ahtna youth lifts salmon in dipnet, Copper River, near Chitina, July 6, 1954. Alaska State Library, Frederica de Laguna Photo Collection, P350-54-8-41.

Indian potato, rosehips and other plants for use in food preparations. Other plants, such as Labrador tea, fireweed, and wormwood, valued for their medicinal properties, were dried and made into teas or tonics. Still others reportedly had psychoactive properties and were known and used only by shamans (Knighten 2019).

SEASONAL ROUND 1890–1920

Hunting, fishing and gathering are not random activities: the people knew the land, the seasons, and the animals. Each group of Ahtna tended to have a circuit of temporary camps, which were used in an established pattern at particular times for the harvest of specific food sources. In the spring, the people left their winter houses to gather at lakes to hunt muskrat, beaver, and waterfowl. During this time, families also harvested freshwater fish such as Arctic grayling. In summer they moved to the Copper River or a tributary to fish for salmon. In the fall, families moved upland to harvest plants (berries, roots), hunt Dall sheep and moose, and trap ground squirrels, marmot, and porcupine. Late in the fall, people intercepted migrating caribou herds, and fished for whitefish, grayling, and suckers. Throughout the winter they depended on cached food; the men hunted every day for fresh meat, while women and children snared hares in vicinity of winter houses (Strong 1972, 41).

In the next section, four elders describe the seasonal round as they lived it as children and young adults at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. Each lived in a different part of Ahtna Territory. Douglas Billum was born in 1881 near the mouth of the Tonsina River and spent much of his life hunting and trapping around Chitina and Lower Tonsina. Ben Neeley was born in 1914 and lived all of his life in the vicinity of the Gulkana River, hunting as far north as the Tangle Lakes. Katie John was born in 1915 on the upper Copper River and spent most of her life in the northern Wrangell Mountains between the Nabesna and Slana rivers. Jake Tansy was born in 1906 at *C'ilaan Na'* or Valdez Creek and spent much of his adult life hunting and trapping in the Alaska Range and upper Susitna drainage.

***'Atnahwt'aene:* Lower Ahtna – Douglas Billum**

For Ahtna living lower on the Copper River – for example, near Chitina – the seasonal round began with fishing for salmon in late May or early June. By mid-July fishing was over and families then moved to upland hunting camps to hunt large and small game. After freeze-up Ahtna moved back to the Copper River where they spent most of the winter. Depending on how much dried fish and meat they had, the Ahtna remained in their winter homes until late January or early February. At that point, families scattered to outlying camps to hunt and fish for freshwater fish. In late spring they then moved back to the Copper River to prepare for salmon fishing (de Laguna and McClellan 1981, 646). Lt. Henry Allen (1887) recorded that in April of 1885, Chief Nicolai and his people were scattered in camps throughout the Chitina drainage and living off the last of the dried salmon, sheep meat, rabbits, and some moose. As he

traveled up the Copper River, Allen noted that the people he met were anxiously anticipating the first run of salmon.

Douglas Billum spent much of his life hunting and trapping around Chitina and Lower Tonsina. In the 1950s, Billum described the seasonal round to the anthropologists Frederica de Laguna and Catharine McClellan (1958, Box 6.2; 8.6.58). In the summer, Billum's family fished for salmon in the Copper River. Towards the end of July, they moved to the mountains to trap ground squirrels and hunt Dall sheep and moose. In the winter, the family trapped lynx, marten and fox, and in the spring hunted beaver and muskrat. In the spring, Billum's father made trips to the mouth of the Copper River to trade his furs.

Billum said in the spring he and his mother pulled spruce roots from the ground and split them to make a dip net that she used to catch salmon:

> Summer time we get fishing. No stopping. All the same time, working, working, working. To make dip net, me and my mother pull spruce roots. My mother start a fire. Split a stick a little in half. Put 'em on roots. Hand pull the roots through the split stick and take the skin (bark of the roots) off. And warm 'em by the fire. And we put them around to make dip net.

Figure 13: Mary Anne and Douglas Billum standing near their camp, August 3, 1954. Alaska State Library, Frederica de Laguna Photo Collection, P350-54-10-23.

Once the family stopped fishing in late July or early August, they moved into the Wrangell Mountains. Billum's mother made snares used to catch ground squirrels (*tseles*). Sometimes she made 200 snares that she packed into a birch-bark case, similar to a gun case. Billum said:

> Pretty soon we see *tseles*. On Kotsina Mountain we go. Mount Drum, how many men get *tseles*! My mother, she starts cutting sticks about five feet long. And then she put on a string. And where ground squirrel makes a trail she puts a stick across. Puts brush on either side of the trail and she puts snares and snares the *tseles*. One hundred snares she sets in one day. Fifty ground squirrel a day. One morning at 9 o'clock she get 50. She skins them and hangs them up and she makes cache to dry them. And in the afternoon 60. Sometimes 300, 500, 1,000 *tseles*.
>
> She skin them and she keeps the skin. She cut the guts out and clean and she put 'em in the smoke, and she tie up the feet. No flies in the smoke. 2 or 3 days they hang. All dry. Leave it. Put 'em in a sack. We don't eat them we eat dry fish, ba'. [He leaves the skins of the dry fish and his mom sewed the skins into bags for the *tseles*.] She get six bags. Use dogs to pack the *tseles* (de Laguna and McClellan 1958, Box 6.2, 8.6.58).

While Billum's mother snared ground squirrels, she also picked berries, which she stored in birch-bark baskets. Billum and his father hunted Dall sheep and moose, sometimes killing as many as fifty sheep.

When hunting in the mountains, Billum explained that it was *'engii*, or forbidden, to mention the Copper River, rabbits, or porcupine, so as not to offend the ground squirrels. Billum said they could only eat *ba*', or dried salmon. When they stopped hunting ground squirrels, they could talk about those things.

Winter was the time for trapping fox, marten, lynx, and weasel. To catch a lynx, the trapper made a small enclosure, placed the bait inside it and set a trap or snare just outside. As the animal went for the bait, it stepped into the trap. Before Ahtna had steel traps, they used long strips of rawhide to make snares for lynx and fox. Later they bought No. 4 traps. Billum described lynx trapping:

> Start trapping in October, December, January, February. Four months me trap. March, Oh we catch 'em lynx. 3 or 4 lynx me pack on the sled. Tie the lynx by the neck and pull 'em. *'Engii*. A little bit close way to camp me hang up and go inside [it was *'engii* or forbidden to bring a lynx into camp]. Next day me get. If a lynx comes and its [*sic*] a good skin we shoot, no good skin we don't shoot. Snare is better than shoot. Make snare of moose hide and use beaver castor as bait or stink fish as bait. To catch lynx we make a little house, a trap. In front we put the fish. The lynx never gets the fish and we can use the same fish to catch 10 lynx.

In the spring, people moved out of their winter houses and went into the adjacent hills to hunt moose. Some men made the trip to Alaganik at the mouth of the Copper River to obtain gunpowder and other supplies. There were no dog teams, just pack dogs. Men and women pulled the sled. On the way back, they hunted mountain goats:

> Go down to Alaganik to obtain traps, takes about 7 days, but a fast boy can make it in 3 or 4 days. Sometimes 2 or 3 boys go, no women. It's bad weather. No dog team just dog pack. He pack 40 or 50 pounds, big dog can pack 50 pounds.
>
> We got powder, muzzleloader, we come back shooting goat. December sometimes we get ten goats. Lots of boys hunt them. Put on sled, lots to eat, by hand we pull sled. We buy seal, catch them with a spear, eat seal meat. Sealskin makes good moccasins, good boat.
>
> At Alaganik. Native got place to stay. Al [the trader] got good store. He got big house, you go in store and you stay there and get free grub. Two nights we stay. Russian store keeper.
>
> And dance, you know. First time we come to Alaganik, tie feathers on our arms, hankies on our head and dance. Sing! Lots of Tlingit. He see me "good boy" dance! We stay ten days learn Tlingit dance, that's the time we get Tlingit dance. We go down to Alaganik the first of March. No wind, long days, eight days to go down. About 20 days we gone. We take sled.

Late winter and early spring were the most difficult times of year, especially if stores of dried meat and fish ran low. If the situation became acute, people went hungry and sometimes died. To survive, people headed to lakes where they knew they could catch fish such as northern pike, burbot, and Arctic grayling. Douglas Billum told how in the winter of 1897 people were starving (de Laguna and McClellan 1958, Box 6.1, 7.28.58). To survive Billum said his family headed for Sourdough on the Gulkana River where they knew they could get food. In this story, recorded by de Laguna and McClellan in 1958, Billum said he did not eat for twelve days.

> Twelve days me no eat, when I'm young. [His family moved up the] Head of Gulkana. Me come this way up Copper River, break trail way up to Gulkana. Frank Ewan's place. He got ling cod. Me savvy [know there is] ling cod up there. Copper River got no grub. Big trail and we move.

While traveling, the family lived on the bark of young trees. This provided some nourishment, and Billum said "then all right, and me no think me die." They lived off the tree bark for four days. Then in the middle of the night someone came. And my aunt says, "somebody coming. My brother come." He had a big pack with 25 fish, ling cod and grayling. Billum's aunt got up and cooked the fish. His grandmother said "ling cod, we live." Everyone got some fish to eat, but the grandmother warned them not to eat the fish, "you die if you eat," because stuffing themselves after they had eaten so little for so long could produce harmful effects. Instead, she then boiled the fish and made soup, which they drank and then they ate the fish.

Billum counted the number of people who died that winter, "Kotsina Jack had five dead, three [people], two boys and one old man." Other dead included Billum's brother-in-law, a young man, and his mother's sister." Thirteen people altogether died of starvation in the winter of 1897. "No fish; no rabbit; no squirrel, we didn't put up much," Billum said. Then he added "Next winter the white men came."

As the weather moderated, people relaxed until the lakes opened up and they could hunt for beaver. Billum said in April the people rested. Around the first of May when the lakes opened,

> [W]e go beaver hunting. Shoot. Sometimes beaver don't come and we make a dead fall. Sometimes we catch beaver in a net and sometimes chop into beaver house and he [DB's dad] spear right across. Get as many as 50 beaver or 70. May first go beaver hunting for ten days.

Figure 14: Dip net of willow and spruce roots, made by Grandma McKinley for Tenas Charley, kept hidden by river bank, Copper Center, 1954. Alaska State Library, Frederica de Laguna Photo Collection, P350-54-11-2.

***Atnahwt'aene:* Central Ahtna – Ben Neeley**

Central Ahtna followed a similar pattern to those living lower on the river. They fished for salmon in June and July, then moved from the river toward the uplands in August to hunt large animals, trapped in the winter, migrated to the lakes in spring to fish and trap muskrat and beaver, and then returned to the river in late spring to fish for salmon.

Ben Neeley (1987) has described the seasonal round when he was a boy. During the summer, Neeley and his family fished for salmon in the Copper River, then in August they walked up the Gulkana River to Tangle Lakes, at the edge of the Alaska Range, to hunt caribou and

moose, and to pick berries. Just before freeze-up the family returned to their home at Sourdough at the confluence of the West Fork of Gulkana River, where they spent the winter trapping. During the spring they hunted muskrats. (See the Central Ahtna section of Chapter 2 for a quote from Neeley describing these activities).

Sometime in the mid-1920s the family stopped going to Tangle Lakes and stayed closer to the Richardson Highway. Neeley's father moved the family about fifteen miles up the Gulkana River. From August until October they hunted caribou and moose, stopping only when it began to snow. Then they began "setting up for winter," meaning they prepared for the trapping season. In the spring they hunted muskrats, sold their skins, and used the money to purchase groceries, which had to last until the following season. In the summer they moved down to the Copper River to fish for salmon. In the fall they returned to the hunt:

> When the caribou come in the fall time, and then the trapping, the trapping start. That was our lifestyle. Nobody knows work them days. Nobody knows work for money them days. Everybody depends on trapping. April we were trapping rats. So we make money for buy groceries with muskrat skins. Then the month of May, the lakes open, then we start shooting rats. Put up rats. Start shooting the rats. Everyone has to put up the muskrats, then they would go and buy groceries with it. We look at them days we don't, were not just living by the store like nowadays. In them days we look at everything, we had to know, our mom and dad knows how much the groceries last till next season.
>
> Muskrat seasons over first of June. Every [year] we come down here to Gulkana village, and then June month go down the Copper River. Start putting fish wheel in there. Bout a month and a half or so down there we would have enough fish. Dry fish to put out for dog food. Bag bones. All this we packed in, packed it up and delivered it and put it up here in

Figure 15: Drying Salmon at Chitina. Geoffrey Bleakley Collection, Makawao, Hawaii, GB-02-02-11.

> cache. Then in August hunting starts again. We go out moose hunting. We just, people just used to keep going hunting and trapping. People just used to keep going. That's the way I grow up. I grow up there, that's the life I had.
>
> Them days we never wished nothing. We get what we want that's what we get. Nobody knows about the law or gets permit or license. Nobody knows that. We were born in here. They take care of themselves and the animals; they don't waste it.

Tatl'ahwt'aene: **Upper Ahtna – Katie John**

Born in 1915, Katie John spent most of her life in the northern Wrangell Mountains between the Nabesna and Slana rivers. During the summer John's parents fished for salmon at Batzulnetas, then in the fall they traveled through the mountains around Tanada Lake, picking berries and hunting ground squirrels, marmot, and the occasional caribou or Dall sheep. After freeze-up the family moved back to Batzulnetas, and the men trapped. In the spring they moved to Tanada Lake to fish and hunt muskrats, ducks, and geese. John provided a snapshot of the seasonal round when she was a young woman:

> In winter men who are trapping go up there [Tanada Lake] wintertime. Spring [they] come back to Banzaneta [Batzulnetas] June for salmon. August back to Camp Creek. Fall time through Jacksina [Creek], get all the sheep we want. We use lotta dogs [to pack meat] (John 1989).

In an interview with the linguist Jim Kari, John told an extended narrative about fishing for salmon at Batzulnetas using a fish weir or fence across the creek, into which a long, narrow traps was inserted. With an even, slow current and level bottom, Tanada Creek is the perfect environment for a fish weir:

Figure 16: Katie John holding a slate scraper in front of a hide, Mentasta, July 16, 1960. Alaska State Library, Frederica de Laguna Photo Collection, P350-60-3-15.

Łuk'ae data'il li'i 'istliiye dze'xona tez'aann tekeliis dze'.
/While the salmon are still absent they installed the fishtrap.

'Utsii xiik'et tsinanaexdi [daas].
/Then he [Charlie Sanford] would go back and forth to the water watching.

Tetsde 'eł sacagha 'eł sta' 'utsii ya tsinadidaas xot'iix [hwtsiił gha].
/At night and in the morning my father would go back and forth to it [the weir] down below.

Xona tez'aann yii łuk'ae lax kadel'iis.
/Then he would see some salmon swimming into the trap.

Scaande su łuk'ae kadel'iis dze'.
/In the morning he saw some salmon.

'Unuuxu 'unuux hwtsiił tah dze' hwtsiił k'eh dze' ziil.
/On the other side of the weir fence, on the weir, he would holler

"Wey xoo xoo! Wey xoo xoo!" nii.
/Wey xoo xoo! Wey xoo xoo!", he said. [Mrs. John said this is a special call only used at the start of the salmon run to announce the arrival of the run to the whole village].

Yet c'a xona c'elaxde tseh c'elaxde xu' xiigha dahwdighił'aen'.
/When they were running, when they first were running, he would give this signal to them.

"Łuk'ae dighilaek," keniix.
/"Salmon swam in," they said.

Yii txo 'eł xona dzaenn 'eł gha dzaenn hwteziit dze' łuk'ae ketsidelyiis dze.'
/So then all day long, all day long salmon were pushing up there [into the trap].

Sta' Utsuughe tabaagga son'o ts'ina'uhdeya', c'enilaek xa' 'engii su tkut'ae.
/My father would say, "Don't go out down there by the beach." When they are running it is forbidden. Boy he was strict, you can't play in the water, or throw anything in the water (John 1984).

While the run was strong both men and women were fully occupied in catching and preparing fish. The objective was to catch as many fish as possible at the beginning of the season, before the presence of the flies and damp weather in July and August made drying fish difficult.

Dzaennn ta n'eł tets 'eł tiz'aann kanakelyiis.
/During the day and night they would bring the trap back up.

Ka'y' [łuuze] k'at ['eł] kii'aes dze'.
/They string them with those stringy willows.

Tuu yii xiigha tintsicnełtsaedi yii nakiidelaes.
/They put them in the water on stakes that were driven in the water.

Taagga kiinełyeli 'eł ta xona snaan du' c'elats'ii n'eł nidelaes dze'.
/After three days my mother would collect pieces of peeled spruce bark.

Yedu' xona łuk'ae ukat tghot'aasi gha t'ae'.
/These were for her to cut the salmon upon.

Yihwts'en yet'aas yet'aas dze' 'unggat du' dastaann ce'e tah dazdlaa.
/Then she cut and cut and upland there were big racks.

Nduuy dastaann c'a sta' xugha dagiłta'.
/My father had several racks for them (John 1984).

When summer was over, the family left the lowlands around Batzulnetas for Tanada and Copper lakes and the mountains at the head of the Copper River. Most animals, particularly Dall sheep, were found in the mountains, and fish, such as grayling, burbot, and lake trout were more plentiful in Tanada and Copper lakes:

> Nothing you can get Batzulnetas. Just that fish [salmon]. That moose, everything, that way out of river, [i.e. out of the river valley] [and on the] Sanford mountain side of the Copper River. Those place, that's all moose. We stay [in Batzulnetas] 'til after August, 'bout middle of the August, we move up to Tanada Creek, and we go all way up [to the lake], and we go around hill and come back other way for sheep, that one (John 2012).

John's father had a hunting territory that included Tanada Lake and the mountains east and south of the lake. Throughout her narrative she mentions specific places where they hunted sheep, such as Camp Creek, Jacksina Creek, and Flat Cabin, and that the family used dogs to pack the meat. While the men hunted sheep, the women snared ground squirrels. They also worked on tanning the sheep skins the men brought in.

After leaving Batzulnetas, John said her family stopped at the outlet of Tanada Lake, then proceeded up various creeks flowing into Tanada Lake from the east. If they found no sheep, or only killed a few animals, they walked to the end of Tanada Lake and traveled up Goat Creek, heading for upper Jacksina Creek:

> Yeah, up, we go about five, I think six, seven mile, creek coming down [Men Diłeni], take that creek, water hit that lake, I think they say six mile long that lake [Tanada Lake]. Then that place we move over we stay there and we go up creek they catch sheep. We stay two, three days there and then we move over to that lake. I see, I think I know, kle-dee-klen, oh no, Men Diłeni, that creek that name. He had a leak they say, that's what that name mean, Men Diłeni [Katie makes a joke] (John 2012).

Sometime in late fall or early winter, the family moved back to Nataełde (Batzulnetas), and the men went out on their traplines. As spring approached John and her mother moved to Tanada Lake where John's mother caught fish at the outlet of Tanada Lake. John said that her mother knew precisely when the fish were coming:

> They have a fish net, they use fish net and they catch trout, sucker, grayling, round whitefish, and pinnose. Spring they go to outlet [of Tanada Lake] until fish came to Banzaneta [Batzulnetas]. Just like they keep track; they know when fish coming.
>
> Tanada Lake outlet they know winter time five days no fish going, all winter fish go back and forth [migrate through] that creek. Five days no fish go through. They know that too, I don't know how they know (John 2012).

As a part of the seasonal round, John (2004) said that her father set fire to the land to encourage new plant life for the animals:

> My daddy used to take care of animal out there for the eat. He burn those open place, near creek burn everything up and new grass and new leaf coming, make good shape animal. Then muskrat – when hunt muskrat – over burn everything by the lake – all new one come back up. That's the way they keep animal fat. Now start forest fire. Even blueberries grow more than before, really big too, new leaf. That's the way they used to do burn everything – that's the way [they] keep moose fat and caribou.
>
> Sheep stay up high – burn down the bottom where they coming down to eat. Father used to burn up the creeks in the mountains – winter time moose up there – open place – and brush grow better – burn there and next year all new stuff coming out. Tetlin – big burn – more moose now – fresh food. But old brush no good for them. Any place forest fire good place to eat.
>
> You know Alaska, long time ago never see forest fires – water under the ground. Dig moss – get it out big one, I used to know just wet. No forest fire long time ago. But all those things was change, now coming dry.

Hwtsaay hwt'aene: **Western Ahtna – Jake Tansy**

Before 1900, the *Hwtsaay Hwt'aene*, or Western Ahtna, utilized the entire upper Susitna Basin, spending most of the summer along the base of Alaska Range before moving to the shelter of the spruce forest along the Susitna River for winter. The *Hwtsaay Hwt'aene* harvested a large variety of resources, although they relied primarily on caribou and freshwater fish. Of all the food resources available, freshwater fish were the most reliable; they could be harvested almost any time of the year and were found in predetermined locations.

Jake Tansy was born at C'ilaan Na' or Valdez Creek on the upper Susitna River and spent all of his adult life hunting and trapping in the Alaska Range and upper Susitna drainage. In this narrative Tansy describes aspects of the seasonal round of Western Ahtna who lived at a village called Nilben Caek'e ("water surges mouth") before they moved to Valdez Creek in 1903. He emphasizes hunting caribou in late summer and early fall. The meat was dried and then transported in skin boats down the Susitna River to Nilben Caek'e. During the winter, people trapped and in spring took their furs to Knik to trade for tea, sugar, tobacco, and ammunition:

> **Nilben Caek'e yet su ts'utsae xona si dghałtsiy' c'a hwnax kughila'.**
> /There at "water surges mouth" [Nilben Caek'e] long ago when I was small was covered with houses.
>
> **Saende hwtsiic na'aayi eł co's na'aayi eł hwtsiic na'aayi ts'ił ts'etendełi 'eł**
> /In summer, in "leaves red month" [September], in "molting feathers month" [August], in "leaves red month" they would leave in one group and

yii nen 'ungge łuu gha tsicdze' łuu naghalt'e'dze'
/in that month [go] uplands by all the glaciers, the many glaciers,

łuu gha every ts'iłghan yu family tah xutah nakadełts'e'.
/By the glaciers every family they would walk about the glaciers.

Dił't'aey 'unggu naghal'aats'i yii keghaax.
/They would kill bull caribou that were moving about in the uplands.

Ts'isaen' hwtsicdze' c'tsen' ggan kiighaax.
/During the whole midsummer they made the dry meat.

Xona ye łu łuu gha łuu t'aa ts'inił'aats'de yede hwtsicdze' ts'ihw... ts'ihwkolaes.
/Then as they [caribou] move out beneath the glaciers, they would bring that [meat] out.

Lghodzi, tcentsic ts'elghodzi kae deghaax.
/The skin boats, were assembled with a willow pole-frame.

Ts'akaey yene łu c'ezes łenkii . . . niłenkiidełkaan'.
/The women would sew together the skins.

Yet lghodzi ae'uknghestkaan' xu tkiił'iis.
/There the skin boats would be sewn [strapped] into a concave shape.

Ngge' ts'abaeli tah kiigha natedeł dze' t'adzaex kiigha nadilyaes dze'
/They would go into the uplands among the spruce and they would bring back inner spruce pitch.

yii t'adzaex hdnelghuuts.
/they would warm up that pitch.

Yi kae hwk'e łinakiidełkaan' xu.
/And with that [plus the raw sinew] they would sew them together

Ukaan' kae eł hwtsicdze' k'a t'adzaex kededziik'.
/All of the seams were smeared with inner spruce pitch.

Cu 'eli c'a batał'aaghe. Xona yełu' lghodzi tcen kiideghaaxi
/That would not leak. Then those were the pole frame skin boats that they made

yii yae 'utngeskaan' xu' t'el'iis.
/these were sewn in that way.

C'etsen' hwtsicdze' naghalt'aedze' baetnelt'os.
/All of the meat, everything was stuffed inside [the skin boats]

kaydii k'e tsicdze' kae kiinadelghesdze' k'a 'udaa'.
/then all of them floated the boats downstream.

Xona Nilben Caek'e hwts'e' yanaghatkos.
/Then they came back by boats to "mouth of water surges stream."

'Udaa' ye naketkaes hwna
/As they returned back downstream there,

tsicdze' 'unggu dahtsaa dakiiłdeł.
/they put everything upland in elevated caches.

Xona naatseł n'eł xona tsuugi eł gha ni'kelaes, tsuugi eł keghaax
/Then with the snowfall for marten, they would harvest marten.

nunyeggaay eł keghaax.
/they would kill foxes too.

C'a 'unggu łuu gha xona gaa ghanaay c'ezes ldaan' yii łu takiidełggaas dze'.
/Also the uplands glacier caribou skins they would dry some of them.

Yii c'a xona c'ezes k'a c'etiy tnelt'e'i.
/So thus they would harvest very many skins.

Xona ye łu xona tsuugi eł tiy keghaax xona.
/Also they killed many marten as well.

Ngga su xayti xay tkolaexdze',
/Some passed the winter in the uplands and,

xona 'use, 'use Knikde, 'use Knikde 'use yet store tsuuxu nakii'eł tedełdze'
/then out ahead [to the west] to Knik, out to Knik to the store in the lowlands they would go with those furs].

'Use yet store ts'e' xona kii'eł tedełdze'. 'Use yet ts'eghidełde xona,
/They went go out ahead to the store with that. Then as they came out ahead there,

saxal eł c'aan eł k'a'tse' eł lasgi eł yii tsicidze' kii'eł 'uketdze'.
/with that they bought everything, sugar and flour and bullets and tobacco.

Yii ketdze' tanakelyaes dze'.
/And they brought back up what they had bought.

Xona yii k'a xodze' cu saen yii saen nakodlaexdze' k'a'tse' eł hwtsicdze' yii t'axt'ełaex.
/Then in that way as summer would pass they would all have a supply of shells.

Niits'e k'a xona yehwk'e xona yaen' xu' eł dahwde'estnesi.
/I only know just this much based upon hearsay [what was being said] (Tansy 1984, translated by Jim Kari).

After the discovery of gold in 1903, most of those Western Ahtna who lived at Nilben Caek'e moved to the community of Denali, on Valdez Creek. They continued to use the same areas as before the

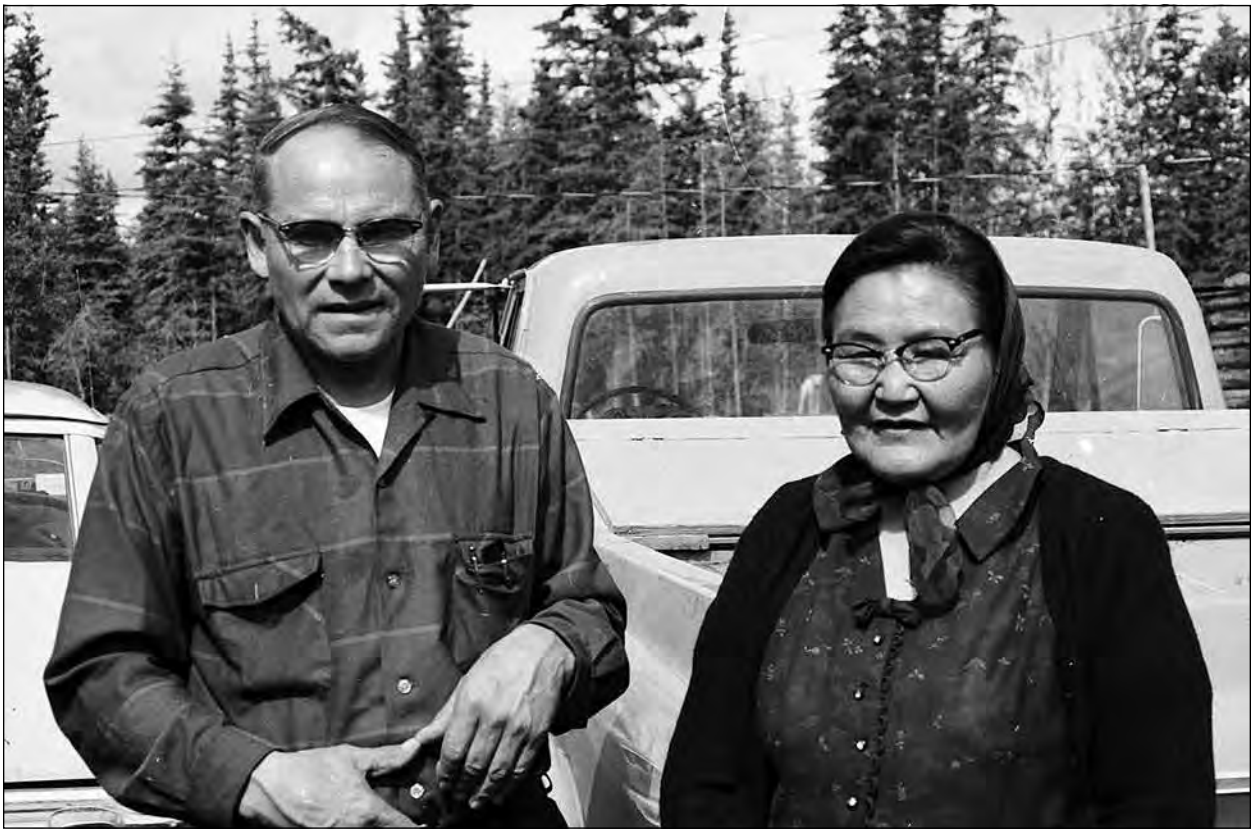


Figure 17: Jake and Lily Tansy in Copper Center, July 3, 1968. Alaska State Library, Frederica de Laguna Photo Collection, P350-68-3-6.

move and to follow the same seasonal pattern. During World War II, the US government closed all gold mining, including the Valdez Creek mine, at which point most Ahtna living at Denali moved to Cantwell.

TRADE

Trails were conduits for the movement of both goods and people. Up until the late nineteenth century, Native trade trails linked the coast of Alaska with the interior. On the Gulf of Alaska lived the Yakutat Tlingit who had sea products such as sea mammal oil, seaweed, and sealskins that they traded to the Lower Ahtna for furs, tanned moose and caribou skins, spruce gum, porcupine quillwork, and copper. Raw copper nuggets are particularly abundant in the Chitina drainage and were traded throughout much of Alaska. The Tlingit coveted the metal, which they hammered into plates, distributed in potlatches, as well as coffee bowls and knives. To cement their relations with the Tlingit, Lower Ahtna women married Tlingit men, and genealogical data indicate that Nicolai had two Tlingit brothers-in-law, one of whom was named "Golden Goodlataw" (Pratt 1998, 84).

The Lower Ahtna also traded with Upper Tanana Dene and Ahtna from the upper Copper River. One site for this trade was Nicolai's winter house in the upper Chitina River drainage, where he left beads, percussion caps, and powder purchased at Nuchek in Prince William Sound, in exchange for furs from Dene living farther north (Allen 1887, 132). Trade with their northern neighbors was extremely important to the Lower Ahtna, and Nicolai apparently prevented other Ahtna and Upper Tanana people from traveling to the American trading post at Nuchek. A man named Batzulnetas Billy told nonnative traveler Addison Powell (1909, 52) that Nicolai actually prevented Billy's father, an Ahtna chief from the upper Copper River known as "old Bachaneta," from going downriver to Prince William Sound.

Intertribal Trade

Ahtna belonged to an ancient and widespread trade network linking them with Native groups across Alaska and western Canada (de Laguna and McClellan 1981, 650). Most evidence of pre-colonial intertribal trade comes from archaeological sites, but some written evidence reveals the extent of this trade throughout Alaska and western Canada (*cf*. Birket-Smith and de Laguna 1938; McClellan 1950; Slobodin 1960; Spencer 1959; Tanner 1965; Whymper 1966; Wrangell 1980).

Ferdinand von Wrangell, chief manager of the Russian American Company (RAC) from 1830 to 1835, collected considerable information on Alaska's geography and Native peoples, including intertribal trade. Wrangell's observations appear in the book *Statistical and Ethnographic Information on the Russian Possessions on the Northwest Coast of America*, published in German in 1839, and include a description of trade among Alaska Native peoples (Wrangell 1980, 32). Dena'ina made soft leather from caribou skins that the Tlingit used for underwear and foot coverings; the Chugach of Prince William Sound received copper from the Ahtna. The Chilkat Tlingit made hooligan oil, leather armor, and "cloaks" from the wool of "wild sheep" (Chilkat blankets), all traded to Dene living in what is now western Canada and eastern Alaska. Dentalium shells from the Queen Charlotte Islands were another trade item, as were slaves. All of these items, according to Wrangell were:

> […] the subject of a lively trade, so that before the arrival of Europeans, when iron was still unknown, the Queen Charlotte Islanders made their axes from copper which they received from the Copper River and the Kuskokwim tribe wore dentalium ornaments which had been collected in the Queen Charlotte Islands (Wrangell 1980, 32).

Figure 18: Head and shoulders engraved portrait of Baron F. P. Wrangell, Alaskan manager of Russian-American Company, 1830-1835. Alaska Purchase Centennial Collection, Archives and Historical Collections, Alaska State Library.

In Wrangell's estimation, intertribal trade grew after the arrival of the Russians. He noted Native traders were sharp business people who endeavored to keep the trade in their own hands, and "watch over it with greater care and jealousy than even we European trading nations are accustomed to" (Wrangell 1980, 33).

As chief manager of the RAC, Wrangell was interested in the extent of Native trade and how the RAC could tap into already existing trade networks, especially those reaching into interior Alaska. At Cook Inlet, the Russians met Ahtna traders from "Lake Mantylbana" (*Beneiil Bene*', or Tazlina Lake) and *Nataełde* (Batzulnetas), as well as Dene from the lower Tanana village of "Titlogat" (*Tuu Tl'aat* or Toklat), near Denali. The Russians gained a working knowledge of the Upper Cook Inlet Dena'ina language. "All these tribes," Wrangell wrote, "depend on one another in trading their products, and display expert knowledge in their choice and purchases. One of the most desired products was skin shirts made by Ahtna and decorated with porcupine quillwork dyed with cranberries" (Wrangell 1980, 58).

According to Wrangell, Ahtna traded with Dene they called "Kolchan" or "Galtsans." In the Ahtna language, *ghaltsaane* (or *keltsaane* in the Mentasta dialect) refers generally to Dene who are not kin and specifically to those living along the Tanana and Yukon rivers (Kari 1990, 367). Ahtna distinguished between those Kolchan living "close by" and those living on the Tanana and Yukon rivers. Elsewhere Wrangell refers to the upper Ahtna as "Copper Galtsan" from the village of "Nutatlgat" or Nataełde, distinguishing them from "Ahtna" who came from Tazlina Lake. Copper Galtsan had "English goods" along with "copper money" and "coral" (dentalium?) that came from Natives whom Wrangell was told lived in a fort. Wrangell thought this referred to Chilkat Tlingit who traded with American ships (Wrangell 1980, 52).

Lower Ahtna traded with Eyak, Tlingit, and Chugach from Prince William Sound. According to Frederica de Laguna, in the early nineteenth century, Ahtna did not travel down the Copper River to reach Prince William Sound, but instead followed a route via *Tatitl'aa Na'* ("backwater river," or the Lowe River) that took them to *Tatitl'aa* ("back water," or Valdez Arm) and then on to *Nudzak* (Nuchek). They paid tribute to the Chugach at Ellamar, a village in northern Prince William Sound, for passing through their territory. For some reason, either because of a dispute or fear of measles epidemic in 1868, the Ahtna discontinued use of this route and went down the Copper River to Nuchek or traded with Eyak (de Laguna 1956, 2–3). Ahtna paid a commission to Eyak for delivering copper to Nuchek and bringing back trade goods. Besides copper, Ahtna traded ground squirrel parkas, mink, marten, and muskrat for tea, beads, and china dishes (Birket-Smith and de Laguna 1938, 152).

Ahtna oral tradition is full of stories about travel to the coast and trade with other Native groups. The story "Big Chief Come Over" is about Ahtna trading with the Tlingit at Tatitlek in Prince William Sound. As told by Jim McKinley (de Laguna and McClellan 1958, Box 6.4, 8.16.58), the story takes place during the Russian occupation of Alaska and could be the earliest story about Ahtna trading in Prince William Sound. The Ahtna first visit the Eyak, who are living around Cordova, and then go to Ellamar. They begin trading with a group of Tlingit, but trouble arises when a second group arrives under the leadership of the "big chief." The Ahtna have nothing left to trade, which angers the "big chief." Trouble is averted after the Ahtna and Tlingit chiefs talk, and the Ahtna stay to dance "for a good month and a half," even though they are afraid of the Tlingit, who dance with their spears:

> He [a Tlingit chief] stole Russian boat in war with the Russians, and he sink Russian boat (but this happened after he had traded with Copper River people).
> The Copper River bunch went down to Cordova. They wanted to buy some trade. As soon as they find out, the Cordova people say, "there's some gendzuuy [Tlingit] down at Tatitlek. They come from Juneau already, they said. The Copper River people went to Tatitlek or to Ellamar. Some more [Tlingit] were coming from Juneau pretty soon, they said."
>
> The Copper River people went in and trade and were buying things. And when they come back to Ellamar another bunch was coming from Juneau. The Tlingit kaskae was coming to meet together. They stay there a good month and half – they dance, and trade. They're afraid of each other. The Copper River people kind of afraid.
>
> The [Tlingit] guy dance with spear. The Copper River people afraid because they dance with spear. Well they kind of backed up. Pretty soon the [Tlingit] kaskae talk. He talk plain or fine. They get along fine together. They get acquainted. They stay together a month and half. The Wolf dance and all other dances, the Copper River dances, they trade dances. The kaskae get mad at Copper River because they can't buy his stuff. No war, but get mad. But after that they straighten 'em up good. That was the only time they had trouble, but no war started. They get along fine. That's the story I know.

> I don't know the name of the [Tlingit] chief.
>
> He stole the boat after the first time. He think about get stuff on his own. He stole Russian little boat, big boat!
>
> It was not a dugout canoe, a Russian boat that came into Ellamar. He get trouble. He get lots of stuff, boxes, blankets. He's big chief. He steal man too, I guess. When he come back they hear how he steal boat and boat driver – kill the one man who drive it.
>
> […]
>
> Come from Juneau – TłAx'etEn – say that's Juneau's name. That's where kaskae come from. That's way far man. Never see them people very often. He was Eagle [clan] I think. About hundred men came with him. He was chief (de Laguna and McClellan 1958, Box 6.4, 8.16.58).

Ahtna also traded to the north, over the Wrangell Mountains into what is now far eastern Yukon Territory. Catharine McClellan (1975a, 502) wrote that stories in the Chilkat Tlingit oral tradition stress the fortunate discovery of "strangers," or Dene who could supply them with copper and furs. McClellan thought these stories referred to Ahtna and Southern Tutchone. It is unknown whether Ahtna met directly with the Chilkat Tlingit or traded through Southern Tutchone intermediaries. In pre-colonial times, the Chilkat traded Chilkat blankets, baskets, a fungus used to make red paint, and dentalium. With the arrival of Europeans, this trade expanded, and the Tutchone traded guns and other goods for copper and a blue dye that came from the Copper River (McClellan 1975a, 509).

COPPER

The Ahtna have a long tradition of working and trading copper, which was extremely desirable not only for making tools and weapons but also as a sign of social status. According to one observer:

> Copper was just like gold to those who did not have access to it. When they [Tlingit] came to the Cordova region they bought it, they did not dig it out. Just a little flat piece of copper 6 inches long and wide was worth a slave. Seven of these pieces were worth seven slaves (unpublished notes from John P. Harrington, quoted in de Laguna 1972, 354).

In the Ahtna tradition, copper is associated wealth and with the supernatural. Copper, like all objects in the Ahtna tradition, is animate, or alive. It is considered pure and incorruptible with the capacity for endurance, an attribute highly valued in Ahtna culture. In the Lower and Central dialects of Ahtna, the word for copper is *tsedi*, or "that which is hammered," while in the Upper Ahtna dialect, copper is called *tesetann'* or "rock excrement."

Lumps of pure copper can be found lying on the ground throughout much of the Chitina River basin, but particularly rich deposits are located within a 75-mile arc stretching between the Kotsina and Chitistone rivers (Mendenhall and Schrader 1903, 16; Moffit and Maddren 1909, 47). Archaeologists think Ahtna began using copper between 1,000 and 500 years ago, producing arrowheads, awls, beads, personal adornment, knife blades, and copper wire probably through a process of heating and pounding or cold hammering (Cooper 2006, 2011; Pratt 1998, 79–80; Thomas et al. 2020; Workman 1977, 31). Copper was widely traded throughout Alaska, so it is not surprising that Europeans learned of the region's copper deposits early on in their contact with Alaska Natives. The first written reference to the Ahtna and copper comes from a report describing a Russian expedition to the mouth of the Copper River in 1783 in which the Russians encountered a group of Alutiit who told them of traveling up the Copper River to trade for furs and copper (de Laguna 1972, 113).

Ahtna have several oral traditions about copper; two are about poor boys who become wealthy. In one story, a boy is chased out of his maternal uncle's house. In the forest he hears singing coming from below the ground. It is a big copper nugget singing to him. The boy digs up the copper and becomes rich. *Cuuy* or "least weasel" is another story about how a poor, low-status boy becomes wealthy through his association with copper. *Cuuy* learns to work copper by hanging around the copper chiefs. He makes arrowheads, takes them to the Tanana and Yukon rivers to trade, and becomes rich, bringing home nine slaves or drudges (*elnaa kaey*). To reach the Tanana River, Cuuy followed the trail called Gaan'Tene or "trades goods trail" that goes over to Valdez Creek (Kari and Tuttle 2018).

The copper deposits found in the upper Chitina River drainage were under the control of several Ahtna *denae,* or chiefs, who lived at the mouth of the Chitina River. Ahtna elder Frank Billum named three of these *denae*: 1) *Ts'es K'e Denen* or "Person of on the Rock," chief at O'Brien Creek; 2) *Taghael Denen* or "Person of Barrier in Water," chief of Taral; and 3) *Hwt'aa Cae'e Denen* or "Person of Beneath [the mountains] Stream Mouth," chief at Fox Creek. *Ts'es K'e Denen*, according to Billum, was renowned for his ability to work copper:

> Three brothers, just like I told you that Taral was the biggest village, Taghael Denen was the one that used to own that village in Taral. And Ts'es K'e Denen his brother was straight across there right on O'Brien Creek and then Fox Creek, that's the other brother too. They're all three brothers. They're the ones find, uh, they didn't find it but they continue with that native copper to make knife. Chief Ts'es K'e Denen was an Indian blacksmith or something like that. He was the one that used to make copper knifes. ….he used to know how to work it. Not know how he cut it, that's something I don't know, how they do it. Yeah, and that's way before white man ever stepped into Copper River. They used to make the arrowhead out of copper. And spear and so on (Billum 1992).

In addition to *Hwt'aa Cae'e Denen*, Jim McKinley named *Tsedi Kulaen Denen*, chief of "Copper Exits Place," and *C'elax Denen*, chief at Long Lake, as *denae* associated with the control of copper. From the trade in copper, these *denae* became wealthy and the Copper River people gained enormous prestige (Kari and Tuttle 2018, 93).

Another source of copper was Keltsan Creek, a tributary of the upper White River.[1] This was near the borderlands of several neighboring Dene groups, including the Ahtna, Upper Tanana, and Northern and Southern Tutchone – all of whom contested for control of copper production and distribution in this area (Moodie et al. 1992, 156). During the late nineteenth century, Keltsan Creek was under the control of a man known as Copper Chief. Catharine McClellan (1975b) asserted that Copper Chief was multilingual and had several wives. McClellan (1975b, 30–31) said that Copper Chief lived on a mountain on the upper White River and that he spoke the Upper Tanana and Han languages. Jack John Justin said that Copper Chief spoke the Upper Tanana and Southern Tutchone languages and that he was married to an Ahtna woman from Chitina whom he met when her family came to trade on the upper White River. Copper Chief raised his family at *Chidah łeeh Männ* (Tachawsahmon Lake) on the upper White River, and they were staying there when Justin visited the lake in 1910 (Justin 1992). According to Catherine McClellan's (1975b, 30) sources, Copper Chief was either Upper Tanana or Northern Tutchone, or possibly Han. According to some elders Copper Chief did not speak the same language as his wife, who was from Fort Selkirk (near the present-day town of Pelly Crossing, in Canada's Yukon Territory). Whatever the case, all sources agree that Copper Chief controlled the source of copper on the upper White River.

Neighboring Indigenous groups also had legends about copper in the Kletsan Creek drainage. One story related to McClellan (1987, 56) by Southern Tutchone elder Albert Isaac tells of a man who climbed a steep glacial ice-wall on Mt. Natazhat (*Nat'ayat*), chopping steps using a copper pick and an iron pick.

[1]The name for the White River translates as "copper river" in at least one of the Dene languages spoken in the area, according to the late nineteenth-century journalist Edward James Glave (cited in Cruikshank 1981, 79).

When he arrived at the top, he could not climb back down, because the steps had melted into smooth ice, and he eventually turned to stone. But before doing so, he cast his iron pick toward the ocean and his copper pick toward the interior, saying "Be copper on this side!" This resulted in the copper deposits found in places such as the Kletsan Creek drainage.

In an interview with de Laguna and McClellan (1958, Box 6.4, 8.16.58), Jim McKinley talked about the different objects made from copper and trading the metal to the Tlingit.

> Interviewer: Did the Gendzuuy [Tlingit] buy copper?
>
> Jim McKinley: Oh yes, they do that. They buy copper. They [Ahtna] trade down there lots. You know. No the Gendzuuy didn't come up [the Copper River]. These people always trade down there on the coast. The Russians trading there, and they trade with each other. They went to Cordova some place. That's why they trade dances. They met each other.
>
> Chitina was where they got the copper. That's why they call it Chitina. It's mostly there. That's why they call it Tsedi Na'. They get copper there. No they can't get it here [Copper Center], only at Chitina. Oh yes the people here can get it. [How?] Well, the Chitina people must be trade. I never heard trouble with the Chitina people [about getting copper].
>
> Interviewer: When they take the copper to trade do they make it into something?
> Jim McKinley: I don't know, arrow points they make themselves. They make something. I don't know if the copper is already shaped.
>
> I don't think there's any place down on the coast that has copper. That's only I heard the Chitina River [where people get copper]. I don't know about getting copper from the While River.
>
> People make knife, anything. They trading that way you know. Spiral handled knife [niłdzaats'aghi]. Handle divided like a sheep horn.
>
> They make copper arrow, ring for woman, ring for wrist, men and women wear; earring they make too. Ya they wear nose ring everyday.

Russian Trade

Russian interest in the Copper River was stimulated by copper, furs, and desire to find a route to access the unexplored interior. Starting in the late 1700s, the Russians sent expeditions into Ahtna territory. Ahtna had a reputation for being hostile to Russian intrusion, based on at least three episodes in which Ahtna killed members of Russian expeditions. In 1794–95, Ahtna killed members of the Samoilov expedition at *Nataełde* (Batzulnetas; Grinev 1993, 57; Kari 1986, 75). In 1804, they killed a Russian named Galaktionov and his interpreter, and in 1848 members of the Serebrennikov expedition were killed at *Stl'aa Caegge* ("rear mouth" or Slana; Grinev 1993; Kari 2014, 96). Fred John, Sr. and Katie John recorded accounts of all three events in the Ahtna language, published in Kari's (1986) *Tatl'ahwt'aenn Nenn': The Headwaters People's Country*. The death of Serebrennikov was felt throughout Russian America. It provided the Ahtna with a fierce reputation and halted Russian attempts to draw the Ahtna into the Russian sphere of influence. As a result, Ahtna were officially recognized as Natives completely independent from the Russian American Company (Znamenski 2003).

Not all Ahtna were hostile toward all Russians. In general, the Ahtna wanted to trade more than anything else. In 1797, Dimitri Tarkhanov explored the Copper River looking for the source of copper. Tarkhanov spent the winter at *Hwt'aa Cae'e* ("enclosed mouth," or Fox Creek village), home of *Hwt'aa Cae'e Denen*. According to Tarkhanov, the chief and his family went to the mouth of the Copper River in the fall to prepare split dried fish where they "conducted a profitable trade in copper which his fellow tribesmen procured on the upper reaches of the river" (Grinev 1997, 8). In 1819, Afanasii Il'ich Klimovskii successfully ascended the Copper River, possibly as far as the mouth of the Gulkana River. He was the first to provide accurate information about the Copper River country, including Mt. Wrangell (Hanable 1982, 25). Soon after Klimovskii's trip, the Russians established *Mednovskaia Odinochka* ("copper outpost"), a trading post located on the east bank of the Copper River somewhere near the mouth of the Chitina River. In such a remote location, the economic viability of the trading post was shaky, since it was hard to supply and could provide only a limited selection of goods, mostly beads and tobacco (Wrangell 1980, 50–51). Additionally, Ahtna living nearest the post prevented other Ahtna and members of other Dene groups from trading there. In 1835 Wrangell assessed the value of the trade:

> The annual purchase of the *odinochka* is very insignificant and rarely reaches 150 river beaver and half a dozen foxes; however, this *odinochka* is very useful in supplying of ground squirrel parkas. Kamelis and processed hides for payment of the employees at the [Konstantinovski] redoubt. However, there is no doubt that the hunting of river beaver and foxes can increase if means of easing their transport to the redoubt will first be sought…. [T]hen it will be possible to think about the promulgation of hunting [among the inhabitants of the Copper River] (quoted in Ketz 1983, 29–30).

In 1850, the post closed after starving Upper Ahtna raided the *odinochka* and took all of the supplies. In 1861 the Russians hired eight Ahtna headmen to help rebuild the post, procure furs, and provide information about Ahtna territory (Znamenski 2003). The post never thrived and was finally abandoned sometime before 1867, when Russia sold Alaska to the United States. The failure of the *odinochka* to thrive had important consequences for the Copper River fur trade after 1850 (Ketz 1983, 44). By the early 1860s the Ahtna were making regular trips to Knik Arm or to Nuchek on Hinchinbrook Island to trade.

THE AMERICANS

In the first decades after Russia ceded Alaska to the United States in 1867, little changed. Ahtna continued to trade at stores in Prince William Sound and Cook Inlet. Hutchinson, Kohl and Company of San Francisco purchased most of the Russian American Company's stock and stores. Eventually Hutchinson and Kohl sold out to the Alaska Commercial Company (ACC), which began doing business at Nuchek in the 1870s. They also took over Russian trade establishments in upper Cook Inlet and built new ones at Knik and the mouth of the Susitna River where Ahtna not only bought tea, sugar, flour, gunpowder, and tobacco, but also went to socialize (Hanable 1982).

Two routes led to Cook Inlet. One led up the Oshetna River, through the Talkeetna Mountains to the Chickaloon River, and down that river to the Matanuska River. Another led down the Susitna River, over to the Talkeetna River via Prairie Creek, and down the Talkeetna to Cook Inlet (Kari and Fall 2003). Ahtna elder John Nicolai described both routes to the anthropologist Ivar Skarland (Skarland and Irving 1953, 2):

> Formerly a number of people spent the summer hunting moose, caribou, and sheep near the glaciers at the headwaters of the Susitna. Late in the summer they would make skin boats and float downriver to the Junction of the Tyone River with the Susitna. After several weeks of local hunting and fishing, and after freeze-up, they would get ready

for the annual trek to Knik Station on Cook Inlet or the Susitna Station near the river mouth. The route taken on the Knik trip was downriver to the mouth of the Oshetna [*K'aasi Cae'è*], which was followed to the headwaters. From there the trail led down the Chickaloon [*Nay'dini'aa Na'*] and Matanuska [*Ts'itonhna'*] rivers to Knik Station. The Susitna Station trade route was by way of Stephan Lake [*Titi'niłtaan Bene'*], Prairie Creek [*Titi'niłtaan Na'*] and down the Talkeetna River [*I'delcuut Na'*]. As no dog teams were as yet in use by the Indians, the trade goods and camping equipment were carried on sledge pulled by men. Late in the winter, the people participating returned to the Tyone camp.

Figure 19: Fanny Sthienfield listening to tape recorder, Chitina, July 12, 1954. Alaska State Library, Frederica de Laguna Photo Collection, P350-54-8-2.

Ahtna elder Fanny Sthienfield said when people walked to Cordova they would go twenty miles and then camp:

> There was no store them days. They go for groceries, sugar, tea and some clothes. They also bought handkerchiefs, pretty things like this [indicating a handkerchief on her head]. Some people use garters – pretty things.
>
> They brought down skins to sell – furs of all kinds. Fox, red fox, silver fox, lynx skin, skin of all kinds. They pack down. They sold it. My dad make copper knife. Then sold it. Some, they make spoon out of sheep horn. Birch bark basket, everything they sold. They used to wear skin clothes. All over beads. There were beads on the shoulders and on the sleeves and around the hem. They used to wear mukluks that came to just below the knee (de Laguna and McClellan 1954, Box 5.1, 7.8.54).

Figure 20: Beaded baby and adult mocassins and two birch bark baskets, made in Chistochina, August 22, 1954. Alaska State Library, Frederica de Laguna Photo Collection, P350-54-12-9.

While American companies took over the stores in Prince William Sound and Cook Inlet, the same mixed-blood Russian-speaking people continued to staff them. Vladimir Stafeev (n.d.) was one of those Russians who remained in the territory working for the ACC. Stafeev served both the ACC and the RAC at Nikolaevsk Redoubt at Kenai, Nuchek, and Tyonek. In his journal, Stafeev (n.d., 16) wrote he saw Ahtna "four times" in his career. He thought them serious traders who were calculating and frugal and not influenced by the trader's suggestions, buying only what they wanted. They purchased mainly beads, tobacco, gunpowder, calico, and ticking. Stafeev thought most of the beads were traded to *Kolchan* (Upper Tanana Dene) because Ahtna did not wear beads. They never purchased lead bullets because they made their own out of copper, which Stafeev said is found in "considerable chunks" in the interior "near the Kolchan." Stafeev thought Ahtna were not Christian: although some had been baptized, he never saw Ahtna wearing a cross or making the sign of the cross.

Ahtna living in the middle Copper River did not go to Nuchek, but traveled to Kenai and Knik following trails that led down the Matanuska River or down the Susitna River. James Sinyon (1973) recalled they always went to Knik:

> They went down the Matanuska River, go to the mouth of it, and then they go to Matanuska Bay. They go down there with caribou skins and fox. Every winter the people go there. They buy tea, tobacco. The last time I was down there was 1906. While most of the time we was there we just camp and sit around and eat. We don't know the winter went by. We finally moved one day this way. We use sledges and we go up [river]. We come back we just use sledges on it [the river]. Well we went up the Chickaloon River, we come over the pass into the Oshetna River and we come to the Susitna River we thought we get on the ice in the that river.

As the American fur trade developed, certain *kaskae*, or chiefs, especially those living on the trade routes to Nuchek and Cook Inlet, became rich. Morrie Secondchief referred to men such as Chief Nicolai of Taral and Chief Tyone as the first Ahtna fur buyers. These men organized and led the trading expeditions that brought back trade goods that they either distributed in potlatches or sold to other Native people.

The discovery of gold on the Klondike River in today's Yukon Territory, Canada, sparked a gold rush that had a dramatic effect on the Ahtna, opening the Copper River basin to sudden and intensive colonization by prospectors, miners, and settlers. There were several routes to the Klondike, including the famous Chilkoot Trail (near Skagway). In 1897, the Canadian government introduced rules requiring anyone entering the Yukon Territory to bring a year's supply of food, which typically weighed around 1,150 pounds. By the time camping equipment, along with tools and other essentials were included, a typical traveler was transporting as much as a ton in weight. To evade the Canadian customs posts and provide an American-controlled route into the interior, Americans developed the "all-American route," which aimed to reach the Yukon through the port of Valdez, over the Klutina Glacier and up the Copper River (Berton 2001).

New markets for wild game, fish, and firewood were created as the Euro-American population grew and added to the incremental changes influencing the traditional hunting and gathering economy. Gold-mining operations also impacted the environment in ways that were at least partially responsible for more consequential changes to the Native economy. The newcomers depleted much of the game resources

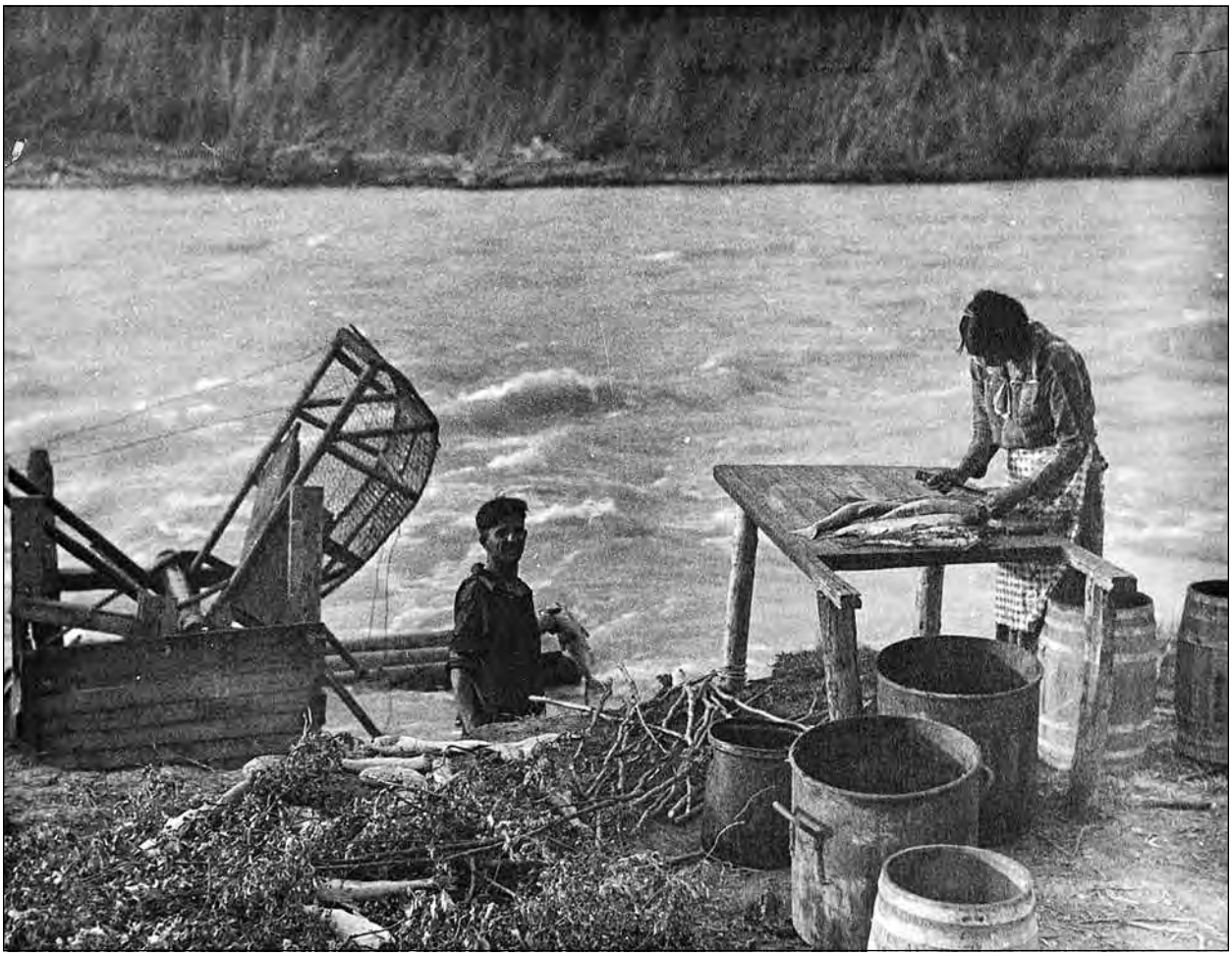


Figure 21: Fish wheel and cleaning fish on Klutina River, Copper Center. Alaska State Library, J. C. P. Skottowe Photograph Collection, P30-088X.

on which the Ahtna had depended. Ahtna were adapted to migrating seasonally in order to make a living; they were not prepared to settle in one location in order to keep their children in school. In 1909, J. H. Romig visited a number of Ahtna villages to report firsthand to the Commissioner of Education, who at the time was responsible for the welfare of Alaska Natives. Romig (1909) wrote of visiting the home of Doc Billum, a famous Ahtna *denae* and sleep-doctor:

> There are two villages on the Copper River below the mouth of the Tonsina with a total population of about 99 people. Each village has a chief who looks out for the villagers and these people are not yet calling for help. Chief Billum said they had three months [*sic*] provisions, that the caribou, moose and sheep were all gone and they were sometimes cold and sometimes wanted meat. He said Whiteman provisions were not good for the people but they could not get other food except fish.

Romig then moved on to Copper Center where he heard the same story; game was scarce, and there were few fur-bearing animals left. Ahtna also told him "too much beans, too much rice, too much bacon and plenty of stomach ache. Before white men came there was plenty to eat and meat and skins for moccasins. Now too much hungry, too much cold, too much sick and then all the same die" (quoted in Romig 1909).

According to Romig, the problem was that "the game and furbearing animals are almost gone" and the London Market governed the cost of furs, while the price of local goods was governed by the price of freight at $200 a ton. Even when they were able to trap furbearers, food prices were so high that the Ahtna could not afford to buy much.

L. A. Jones, a schoolteacher at Copper Center, wrote that Ahtna still lived by hunting and preferred their own foods to those of the whites. Parents took their children out of school to go hunting "deep in the mountains" where, if they killed moose, they would camp until the snow came. Because game laws had not been enforced, Ahtna were able to sell meat. But Jones (1913b) feared that if the game laws were enforced the Ahtna would starve. Later on, he added:

> The White men have largely killed their game and fur bearing animals, leaving them with no way to make a living. They have not yet learned the White man's way of making a living. There is very little labor, which they can secure. Many are sick; tuberculosis seems to be among them all. Several parents have died leaving their children homeless (Jones 1913b).

For Jones and other government agents, the issue was how to assimilate the Ahtna into American culture and create a "civilized" citizen. For some, such as Romig, "Colonization is the only way possible to handle these people and develop the resources the country may have." Romig's other solution was to have the Ahtna grow gardens and to develop a large reindeer herd, but since this would be too expensive, he suggested removing Ahtna "to a place on the coast near the Illiamnia [*sic*] deer herd where fish is plentiful and where the Native could salt fish for the market as a resource" (Romig 1909). The general consensus was that the Ahtna had to give up their seasonal way of life and settle down. "Nomadic habits formerly a necessary means of obtaining a living here, must soon give place to settled and fixed habits" (Romig 1909.

THE MIXED ECONOMY

There was a time when all food and material for clothing, tools, and housing came directly from the land and waters. Today, while the customary and traditional activities of hunting and fishing remain significant, Alaska Natives such as the Ahtna have combined these activities with jobs producing a "mixed economy." In many respects, the mixed economy has its roots in the fur trade when Alaska Natives began trading

furs for glass beads, firearms, metal tools, and clothing – objects that were produced on distant shores and brought to the region by Euro-American traders. Development of the modern mixed economy began during the early twentieth century as Ahtna were forced to settle in newly established villages located along the road system and began to rely increasingly on earning cash to purchase food and other goods at newly established local stores. This shift toward dependence on the cash economy progressed during the course of the twentieth century. Initially, trapping was the major source of cash income – a continuation from the fur trade – but during the course of the twentieth century, seasonal wage employment became prominent as well. In particular, many Ahtna worked in construction and fighting wildland fires. This transition into a full-fledged "mixed, subsistence-market economy" (Wolfe 2000) meant households combined jobs with subsistence activities and invested a portion of their income in small-scale technologies used to harvest wild foods. Examples of such monetary expenditures on subsistence technology include snowmachines, motorized boats, gas, and fishwheel construction and maintenance. Features of the mixed economy included a community-wide seasonal round, high participation rates in hunting and fishing activities, extensive non-commercial distribution and exchange networks, and traditional systems of land use and occupancy (Wolfe 1984).

This economic paradigm further intensified during the 1960s and 1970s, around the time the Trans-Alaska Pipeline was built across the Ahtna homeland and the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) was passed, leading to the creation of Ahtna, Incorporated (see Chapter 7, "It Was Ours All Along"). During this time period, opportunities for wage employment increased, with year-round jobs becoming increasingly available. Along with school and other commitments in town, full-time, year-round work meant that families could no longer stay at remote camps for extended periods of time to harvest seasonally available resources. Instead, they needed to schedule subsistence activities into shorter periods of time, such as weekends and days they could take off from work. Accessing remote areas during brief trips required snowmachines and other technologies that were costly to purchase, operate, and maintain, making the subsistence economy increasingly cash-dependent (*cf*. Pelto 1973).

Selected fish and wildlife harvest and use data from studies conducted by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Subsistence, in Ahtna villages beginning in the 1980s (Table 4) demonstrate that wild resources contribute significantly to the economies of many households in Cantwell, Mentasta, Chistochina, Gakona, Gulkana, Tazlina, Copper Center, and Chitina. In addition to recording resource harvest data and describing seasonal harvest activities in the Ahtna homeland, Division of Subsistence research has documented the complementary roles of harvesting renewable resources and wage employment in the village economies. Note that these data include all residents of the communities, both Alaska Native and nonnative. Readers should consult the Division of Subsistence reports referenced in the table below for more information about the "mixed, subsistence-market economies" in the contemporary Ahtna villages.

Although modern-day subsistence is heavily dependent on money, its value cannot be reduced to how much it would cost to replace subsistence foods with "comparable" store-bought ones. Subsistence customs and practices are inseparably tied to all aspects of Ahtna culture, including social relations, cosmology, ritual, and material culture. For example, networks of family and community members are often involved in harvesting and processing of subsistence foods, which are distributed through broader social networks (Wolfe 1987; Magdanz et al. 2005). Subsistence forms an integral part of Ahtna identity, as it does for other northern Indigenous groups as well.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

To make a living in a boreal forest environment, Ahtna needed to organize in a way that maximized their opportunity to exploit seasonally available food sources and other resources needed for survival. This was the case until well into the twentieth century. Although the available resources varied somewhat among different groups of Ahtna, salmon, caribou, moose, sheep, fish, and berries have all been important foods for the Ahtna.

Accessing these resources entailed following a seasonal pattern of migration. Despite variation in the harvesting patterns among different groups of Ahtna, it is possible to describe a general seasonal round. During the summer months, most groups of Ahtna (except *Hwtsaay Hwt'aene*, or Western Ahtna) lived on the banks of the Copper River or its tributaries, harvesting and processing salmon. After the salmon fishing died down and summer changed to autumn, Ahtna migrated to upland hunting camps, where they put up caribou, sheep, moose, berries and roots, as well as squirrels and other small mammals. As winter began to set in, they harvested whitefish from newly frozen lakes. During the throes of winter, they settled down in large, permanent winter houses, relying on the stores of food put up the previous summer and fall. Over winter they engaged in snaring small animals as well as hunting for moose and other large mammals. Spring months were typically the hungriest, as winter food supplies had been depleted and salmon had not yet arrived. As the snow melted and the ice began to break up on lakes in the region, Ahtna gathered to hunt beaver, muskrat, waterfowl, and to hunt freshwater fish.

Trade, both regional and interregional, provided the Ahtna with resources that were in short supply or unavailable locally. They were part of vast trade networks that extended throughout Alaska and beyond. Trade with the Yakutat Tlingit for marine mammal oil, dried seaweed, and sealskins was particularly important to the Lower Ahtna of the Chitina area. Russian trade goods such as sugar, flour, tea, rifles, and gunpowder began to proliferate during the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Extensive networks of trails were needed to facilitate interregional trade, which, in general, was strictly controlled by the *denae* living at the borderlands of Ahtna territory.

In the twentieth century, large-scale changes to the Ahtna economy precipitated the development of a mixed economy, combining both subsistence and cash economic sectors. This economic change can be seen as part of a broader shift in the relationship between the Ahtna people and their environment. Before, most economic wealth was produced within the Ahtna homeland, supported by trade for items from outside the region. But as contact with Euro-American cultures intensified during the course of the twentieth century, the Ahtna economy became increasingly tied to global capitalism and dependent on goods manufactured as part of the global economy. Even today, subsistence hunting, fishing, and gathering play an important economic role. This subsistence economy continues to be a vitally important part of Ahtna culture and identity. For this reason, the Ahtna economy cannot be reduced to a quantitative measure of dollars or resources.

Table 4: Selected fish and wildlife harvest use data for Cantwell, Mentasta, Chistochina, Gakona, Gulkana, Tazlina, Copper Center and Chitina 1982–83, 1987, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2013

	Year	Cantwell	Mentasta	Chistochina	Gakona	Gulkana	Tazlina	Copper Center	Chitina
No. of Households in Community	1982–83	47	19	27	24	41	n/d	129	24
	2009–2013	83	36	33	77	35	111	158	52
Estimated community population	1983–83	136	67	65	79	115	n/d	439	43
	2009–2013	192.2	106.4	86.8	201.7	103.6	352.4	430.5	133.8
Mean household harvest of wild resources in pounds	1982–83	378	393	311	614	320	n/d	383	342
	2009–2013	238	498	522	449	452	440	599	609
Per capita harvest of wild resources in pounds	1982–83	130	109	115	192	114	n/d	113	190
	2009–2013	101	169	199	171	144	150	220	246
% of households harvesting moose	1982–83	28	32	14	13	14	n/d	0	4
	2009–2013	23	39	14	16	17	11	55	4
% of households using moose	1982–83	61	90	64	44	28	n/d	48	65
	2009–2013	72	95	70	81	89	77	66	67
% of households harvesting caribou	1982–83	30	16	18	30	14	n/d	22	9
	2009–2013	20	4	0	19	6	12	28	15
% of households using caribou	1982–83	33	58	27	61	33	n/d	44	26
	2009–2013	40	47	11	50	48	55	47	50

Table 4 continued

	Year	Cantwell	Mentasta	Chistochina	Gakona	Gulkana	Tazlina	Copper Center	Chitina
% of households harvesting whitefish	1982–83	7	21	9	22	14	n/d	7	4
	2009–2013	1	34	15	7	3	3	11	4
% of households using whitefish	1982–83	7	79	27	22	11	n/d	15	4
	2009–2013	3	60	30	11	13	5	20	4
% of households harvesting berries and/or vegetation	1982–83	67	79	77	87	80	n/d	67	78
	2009–2013	80	91	93	69	79	87	80	91
% of households using berries and/or vegetation	1982–83	67	79	91	89	80	n/d	67	78
	2009–2013	85	96	96	76	90	94	85	93
% of households harvesting sockeye salmon	1982–83	7	16	23	74	61	n/d	63	48
	2009–2013	25	30	48	73	44	69	62	63
% of households using sockeye salmon	1982–83	7	84	77	96	69	n/d	78	87
	2009–2013	61	78	74	92	82	92	86	93

Harvest estimates for 1982–83 are from Stratton and Georgette (1984). Study years are 2009 for Chistochina (Kukkonen and Zimpelman 2012), 2010 for Copper Center and Mentasta Lake (La Vine et al. 2013), 2012 for Gakona and Chitina (La Vine and Zimpelman 2014) and Cantwell (Holen et al. 2014), and 2013 for Gulkana and Tazlina (Holen et al. 2015).

CHAPTER 4: AHTNA SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CULTURE

Until late nineteenth century, Ahtna lived in small, autonomous groups composed of closely related kin. Society was organized around two moieties and composed of several matrilineal clans (cf. de Laguna and McClellan 1981; Reckord 1983a). Whereas Dene groups in Canada and far western Alaska have bilateral kinship systems, in which an individual traces descent through both the mother and father, Ahtna trace descent only through the mother. A person is born into their mother's clan and remains a member of that clan their entire life.

Kinship affiliations were extensive, reaching beyond the immediate group and providing people with a network of relationships from which to seek assistance in time of need. Protocols for interactions between people were strict and governed by *'engii*: it was forbidden, for example, for brothers and sisters to interact except on specific occasions.

Leadership was in the hands of *kaskae,* who were "spokesmen," and rich men called *denae*. *Denae* were distinguished from *kaskae* by inherited titles that associated each *denae* with a specific place strategically located near important resources such as copper and salmon. Both *kaskae* and *denae* were at the top of the social ladder and maintained their positions through the accumulation and distribution of wealth. While wealth served to signify rank, a chief's status was based on their generosity and ability to care for those less fortunate. Highly respected women were called *kuy'aa* (or *kuy'aat*, in the Mentasta dialect).

Today, Ahtna no longer live in small bands. Instead, many live in villages located along the road system that are predominantly Ahtna and are associated with tribal governments. Often, the populations of these villages are amalgamations of descendants from several local bands. Other Ahtna live in towns and cities such as Glennallen, Anchorage, and Fairbanks, or along the highways that run through the Ahtna homeland, in between towns and villages. As in the past, the most important social unit is the immediate family or family members who share the same house. Next in importance is the extended family, including siblings, parents, grandparents, and grown children who live in other households in the community. Members of extended families now often live close to one another; most day-to-day activity takes place at this level. On certain occasions the entire village functions as a unit; for example, winter carnivals such as the Chistochina Fun Days and summer baseball teams are organized along village lines. Village members also work together to put on potlatches. Modern villagers have developed a strong sense of identity with their communities and the surrounding landscapes. While many aspects of the traditional social organization have disappeared, such as cross-cousin partnerships and clan-based marriage restrictions, there is still a strong emphasis on kinship and family. Traditionally defined relationships are still an important part of community life; for example, nephews and nieces are often deferential to their maternal uncles and aunts, while clans and clan membership still play a central role in Ahtna culture.

AHTNA SOCIAL ORGANIZATION: CLANS AND MOIETIES

Ahtna society is composed of eleven different clans, sometimes referred to as tribes by Ahtna elders. A clan is defined as a group of people who are united by either actual or perceived kinship or descent.[1] Each Ahtna clan has an origin story and a totem or symbol, such as caribou, snowbird, or fish tail. The clans are arranged into two sides, or moieties. For many Ahtna, the two moieties are *Saghani* (Raven) and *Nalbaey* (Seagull). For others, particularly Lower Ahtna, they are *Saghani* and *Sgulak* (Eagle). Among different groups of Ahtna, there is also variation in how the clans are arranged within each moiety. Below is a list of Ahtna clans.

Moieties separate the different clans into opposites who intermarry, help one another during life crises, and give each other support during potlatches. In the Ahtna language, people of the opposite moiety

[1]This is different from a descent group, in which people are united by demonstrable kinship. It is also worth noting that clans are exogamous – i.e., in traditional customs, a person always married outside of their own clan.

Table 5: Ahtna clans

Clan name	English translation	Moiety
Tsisyu	Ocher or Red Paint people	*Nalbaey* (Seagull)
Nitsisyu	Second Ocher Paint people	
Udzisyu	Caribou people	
Cela'yu	Salmon Tail people	
Den gige' tahwt' aene	Silverberry people	
Hwggaexyu	Snowbird people	
'Ałts'e'tnaey	One Way people	*Saghani* (Raven)
Taltsiine	Water people	
Naltsiine	Sky people	
Dik'aagiyu	Fireweed people	
Dits'i'ilt siine	Canyon people	

and clan are called *c'aats'ne*, which is derived from the word *c'aa*, meaning opposite. Members of opposite clans intermarry and host one another at potlatches. A member of a particular clan considers someone else of that same clan to be a "relative," while a person in the opposite clan is considered a "friend," "joking relative," "sweetheart" and "partner," and potential in-law (de Laguna and McClellan 1981, 90).

Rules pertain to how a person treats or interacts with his or her "relatives" versus his or her "friends." To break or disregard these rules is considered *'engii*, or forbidden. Fred John, Sr. described the proper behavior between "relatives," or one's cross cousins, versus proper behavior between one's "friends," or parallel cousins[2]. John explained it is correct to assist your friend before you aid your own brother or clan relative. He also pointed out it is wrong to socialize with your relatives, such as sisters and brothers, but that is permissible to socialize with your friends (Kari 1986, 37). This is the kind of advice a chief would give his maternal nephews and nieces.

Jim McKinley explained that relatives, or members of the same clan, were not supposed to joke around or talk freely with one another. For example, McKinley said that members of the *Udzisyu* clan "can't talk with another *Udzisyu* – have fun talk." He said, "You can hardly talk with your own nation [clan]." You can, however, talk and joke around with your friends. He explained that if a man was *Naltsiine* and he married a *Tsisyu* woman, the children would be a *Tsisyu*. As a member of his mother's moiety, he could talk to his father's clan, as Jim McKinley explained: "I never shame to talk with you. I joke with you, I don't care what I say to you. But I can't say what I want to [someone in my moiety or clan], I can't do it" (de Laguna and McClellan 1960, Box 7.5, 8.16.60).

Behavior between grandparents and grandchildren has always been free and affectionate, but a boy customarily treated his maternal uncle, his mother's brother, with great respect, and his uncle reciprocated with polite reserve. This was a crucial relationship because the boy received much of his training and guidance from his maternal uncle. Other kinds of relationships allowed for little or no contact. A maternal uncle and his niece were supposed to avoid one another and were not supposed to address one another face to face. This was also the case between a boy and his paternal aunt.

Brothers and sisters were also to avoid each other. They were allowed to communicate, but only when necessary and only on serious matters. They were not allowed to joke with one another. Jim McKinley said "can't look at my own sister" – in other words, he should avoid looking at his sister, and he certainly could not joke around with her. A man should communicate with his older sister through his wife, but if there is no wife, the man and older sister can talk about business. As Jim McKinley put it: "don't talk for fun, got to talk nice" (de Laguna and McClellan 1960, Box 7.5, 8.16.60).

[2]"Cross cousins" are children of the parents' opposite-sex sibling (i.e., father's sister), whereas "parallel cousins" are children of the parents' same-sex sibling (i.e., mother's sister).

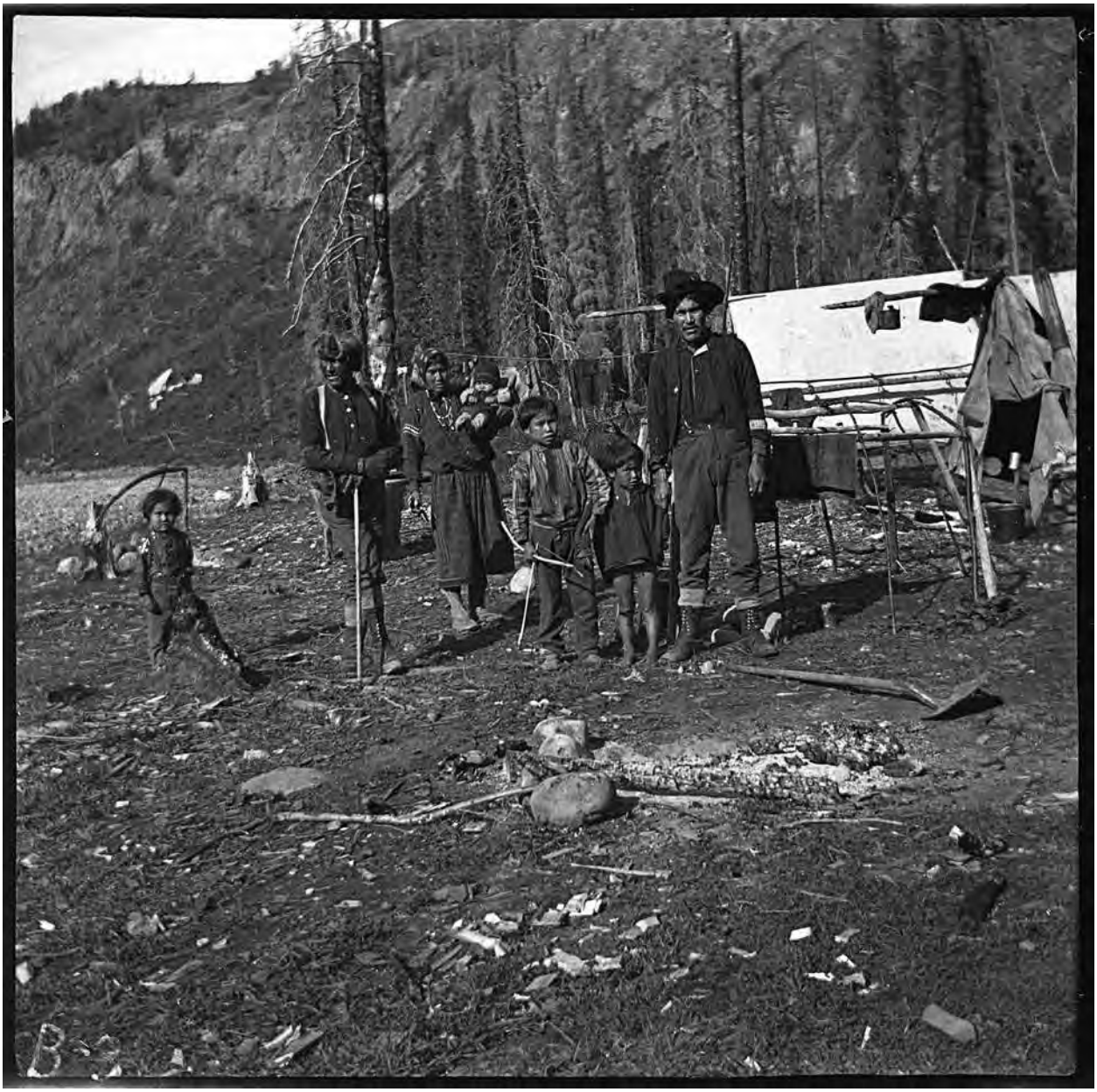


Figure 22 Goodlataw family at Kotsina, 1904. Crary-Henderson Collection, Anchorage Museum, B1962.001.0082.

A man was supposed to avoid talking to his mother-in-law, but he has a joking relationship with his father-in-law. A father-in-law and his daughter-in-law talked only if they had too. The relationship between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law was respectful, but a son-in-law should never talk to or look at his mother-in-law. Molly Billum said "they shame of one another. But they talk if they have too [*sic*]" (de Laguna and McClellan 1954, Box 5.1, 7.15.54).

Often brothers-in-law or sisters-in-law became special friends or partners, called *latsiin* in the Ahtna language. Partners did nearly everything together, including hunting and socializing with the opposite sex. They also exchanged gifts. Douglas Billum said, "partners are different nation [clan]. If one gets anything good he gives it to the other." Billum said that if one partner was no good you could get another one (de Laguna and McClellan 1958, Box 6.1, 6.27.58).

Figure 23: Rev. Jim McKinley (Copper Center), Bible Conference, Copper Center, July 4, 1960. Alaska State Library, Frederica de Laguna Photo Collection, P350-60-2-21.

CLAN ORIGINS

Clans have origin stories explaining how that clan came into being. Ahtna clans have their origins in different parts of Alaska. The *'Ałts'e'tnaey* clan, for instance, is said to have originated in Midway Lake in the upper Tanana Valley. Members of the *Dits'i'ilt siine* clan came out of Wood Canyon, and the *Naltsiine* are said to have floated down from the sky. The *Udzisyu* are said to have originated from caribou found around Tangle Lakes, while the *Tsisyu* originated in the Chitina area around Taral. In an interview with James Kari, Ben Neeley described the origins of the *Taltsiine* clan, which is called the "water clan" because its first members came out of Cook Inlet:

> I come out of the ocean myself. *Talsiine*. *Talsiine* and *Naltsiine* just about paired. That's what the story said. Down the ocean I don't know where at *Tsetneltsiicde* ["red colored rock", a mountain on the west side of Cook Inlet] where mountain kind of colored.
>
> It seems that at this place ocher paint extended into the water. A red-covered mountain side. With bone shell in our nose we walk out, come out of the water, *c'enk'one'* [dentalium shell]. That's our history story.
>
> They said that the Water Clan emerged from the water. Out there beyond [out country] on the shore of the salt water where they call "red-colored rock," they name that place (Kari and Fall 2003, 311).

DESCENT AND MARRIAGE

In traditional Ahtna society, it was believed that a person's marriage partner should ideally be a member of their own father's clan (an opposite clan since descent is reckoned from the mother's side). In this way the two matrilineal lines would continually be linked in marriage. Martha Jackson explained that the ideal marriage pattern was for members of the *Naltsiine* clan to marry people in the *Udzisyu* clan and vice versa. She put it this way "*Naltsiine* marry us [*Udzisyu*]. We [*Udzisyu*] marry always *Naltsiine*" (de Laguna and McClellan 1958, Box 6.3, 8.27.58). By marrying a person from the father's clan, relationships are strengthened, making for more cooperation and reducing the possibility of friction. Figure 24 illustrates matrilineal descent and preferred marriage in which a person married someone from their father's clan.

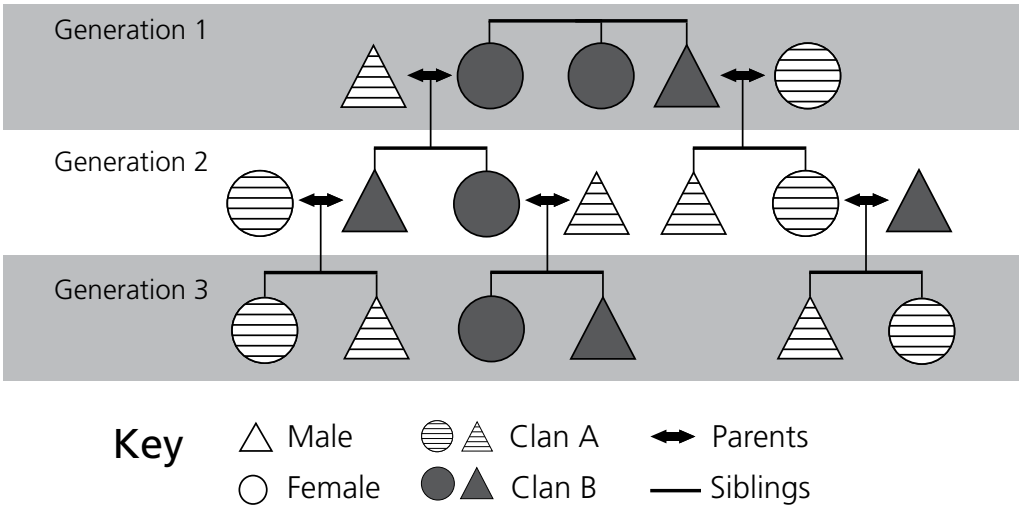


Figure 24: Matrilineal descent is shown across three generations

Villages typically contained members of several different clans, but often a particular one was dominant. Certain villages and their chiefs were once considered to belong to a particular clan. The upper Copper River belonged to the *'Ałts'e'tnaey*, and Tyone Lake was *Tsisyu* but became *Taltsiine* as the *Tsisyu* men married *Taltsiine* women.

While today such rules are largely ignored, in the past it was important that people marry correctly. Marriage between members of the same clan or moiety was forbidden, or *'engii*, while marriage between cross cousins was preferred. Such alliances created social linkages between widely dispersed groups and facilitated trade and exchange. Both Martha Jackson and Adam Sanford explicitly stated that a person should not marry their own relation (i.e., a person from the same clan or moiety), and if they did it would result in dire consequences. Jackson said "If relation marry each other – that's *'engii* – die. That's why lots of people die now. Everybody die. It's not right" (de Laguna and McClellan 1958, Box 6.3, 8.27.58). Maintaining the proper alignment of clans enabled people to situate an individual socially, especially strangers. Knowing what clan a person belonged to, as well as their specific relations, made it easier for people to know who they were dealing with.

GROWING UP

In the past Ahtna children were educated to become skilled hunters or industrious, accomplished managers of their household economy. When a child was born, the parents observed various restrictions for the child's welfare. For example, it was important to protect young children from being exposed to freshly killed animals. Parents "[p]ut charcoal on kid's face when bring [animal] into the house,"

according to Bill and Maggie Joe. "That way don't have a scare; [children] get cramp, and holler from fresh meat. Sometimes kid faint from that game. Sometimes they die" (de Laguna and McClellan 1960, Box 7.2, 8.6.60). Martha Jackson said that when the husband returns from the hunt, he must first tell his wife to "paint the baby's face" before he tells the household he has killed a moose. She said "[y]es 'engii to tell you killed a moose until you put black on the baby's face" (de Laguna and McClellan 1960, Box 7.4, 8.11.60).

Children were disciplined using various methods, including corporal punishment. Bacille George said parents tricked their children into getting up early by telling them about the "man in the water" (de Laguna and Guédon 1968, Box 8.1, 7.10.68). Children were told if they got up early and ran down to the water bucket, they would see the "man in the water," which means good luck. It was also good luck for the child to take only three sips when drinking water.

Figure 25: Martha Jackson sitting on ground at a Bible Conference in Copper Center, July 4th, 1958. Alaska State Library, Frederica de Laguna Photo Collection, P350-58-3-8.

Puberty

Both boys and girls underwent rigorous training at puberty, which included being sequestered and observing restrictions on what they ate and did. By observing these restrictions, young people ensured their own good health and protected the community from misfortune by bringing good hunting luck and making sure that animals did not become aloof or avoid the hunters. Markle Pete said:

> All [is] '*engii* when [a person is] young. You gotta be middle aged before they do anything they want too. For luck they did that. For trapping, stuff like that. They depend on trap long time ago, not like today, you go out, go to work make fast money (Maxim and Pete 2011).

Training for young men consisted of physical conditioning and acquiring practical skills, spiritual power, and values that would make them smart and enable them to get "rich." Early on, fathers trained sons, but after a certain age the maternal uncle took over supervision of a boy's education. Because children belonged to their mother's clan, the mother's brother had a special relationship with her children, including authority over them.

At the onset of puberty, both young men and women were isolated for up to seventy days in a small shelter built away from the family's house. Only female relatives attended the girl during this time, bringing her food and instructing her in sewing and proper behavior. During her seclusion, the girl was not allowed to eat fresh foods – she could eat only cold foods out of a special cup and bowl and drink liquids through a bone tube. Young women were required to wear a hood that covered their face and prevented them from looking directly at anyone. Another reason for wearing the hood was to prevent the young person from being distracted and to teach them how to concentrate upon the task at hand. Puberty hoods were made of moose skin and covered the face with long fringes hung with hooves that rattled to warn people of her approach. Mary Anne Billum

Figure 26: Five young children pose with a dog and a puppy in the Copper River area; village structures behind. Alaska State Library, Eric A. Hegg Photo Collection, P124-13.

described the hood to Frederica de Laguna. It was made of thin skin, cut fringes hung across the face, so the girl could not see anybody. The back of the hood went to the waist. Dentalium shells were hung around the bottom especially along the back, which fell to a point. Buttons were used for decoration on the shoulders, going down the shoulders and arms and down the middle of the back where they met the dentalium. "My goodness!" Mary Anne Billum said, "Just like go to jail. Woman, too much boss. Don't look around! Don't look anybody! 'Engii!" (de Laguna and McClellan 1958, Box 6.2, 7.25.1958).

Young women had to walk with their heads down and avoid walking on game trails or hunter's trails. At the end of the first ten days of seclusion, the adolescent might bathe and begin a series of exercises to ensure good work habits. After thirty days, she bathed again, put on clean clothes, and moved closer to the family home. Restrictions on what girls could eat, and rules such as drinking liquids only from a tube made of a swan bone, lasted for a year. To keep track of the time in seclusion, the adolescent tied a knot in a string. Special counting strings were made for each thirty-day period. The count must begin with the little finger of the left hand and end with the little finger of the right hand. It was *'engii* if counted a different way. Young women also tied up their fingers by putting a loop around the forefinger. The string was then twined between each pair of fingers, and a knot tied when reaching the little finger. Both hands were tied that way and the girl had to do all tasks with her fingers looped together, according

to Nancy George and Tenas Charley (de Laguna and Guédon 1968, Box 8.1, 7.15.68).

Moral Training

Young people were given moral training. Laziness, improvidence, stinginess, lying, stealing, and spreading malicious gossip were countered with warnings, corporal punishment, and rigorous training, such as rising early, running, and taking cold baths. Martha Jackson said that girls and boys were told not to "run around;" boys were told to be respectful of girls, that stealing was bad, as was gossip, and not to bother little birds. Jackson said if the mother bird worried, the one who caused the trouble would worry too (de Laguna and McClellan 1960, Box 7.4, 8.11.60).

Young people were taught to watch their language and to guard against "empty words." In Ahtna culture speech is considered a powerful force that can cause confusion if not controlled. A person should "never talk ahead of time," – that is, plan or say they are going to do something, because that tempts fate and could prove disastrous. The prohibition against "talking ahead of time" now includes talking about a basketball game, a soldier leaving home, or the possibility of killing an animal. The animal might hear the boast, become offended, and avoid the hunter.

Figure 27: Two native boys with bow and arrow, Chitina, July 19, 1954. Alaska State Library, Frederica de Laguna Photo Collection, P350-54-9-23.

After emerging from seclusion, young women were considered eligible for marriage and frequently married older men soon after their menarche. Jeanie Maxim (2011) said girls and boys should not use their own judgment when entering a relationship but rely on the judgment of elders. Young men married much later in life than young women. Most marriages were arranged. Parents watched the prospective spouse carefully to assess their skills. Girls had to demonstrate their accomplishments, otherwise they were not considered good marriage partners. Sometimes a father would dress his daughter well in order to attract a suitor. Hardworking young men were preferred. To demonstrate his ability, the prospective groom worked, sometimes for years, for the bride's parents cutting wood and trapping.

During pregnancy a woman was sequestered away from the house. Elizabeth Pete explained that "babies cannot be born in the house. Have to take care of baby, make it strong, stay in tent one month. Then for good luck stay all by self for another month in house and keep busy, always working and making things" (quoted in Crandall 1983). Markle Pete said that when a young woman had children, they had to retire to a tent and stay there two or three months. The woman was not allowed to walk on the ground but had to walk on boards laid on the ground (Maxim and Pete 2011).

If a woman lost her husband, life could become difficult. Widows had a difficult time if the husband's relatives believed she had not treated her husband well. A woman or orphan without relatives was usually made

into an *'elnae,* or drudge. Martha Jackson said when a woman's husband died, she had to cut her hair and could not laugh or talk to anyone. She would be punished if she did. Widows went to live with the dead husband's relatives and worked for them. Leaving the deceased husband's relatives meant she was ready to marry again (de Laguna and McClellan 1960, Box 7.5, 8.25.60).

Figure 28: Grandma McKinley's doll dressed as pubescent girl, Copper Center, 1958. Alaska State Library, Frederica de Laguna Photo Collection, P350-58-6-10.

THE TRADITIONAL HOUSE

The chief's house was a rectangular structure with an excavated floor below ground level and wooden sleeping platforms lining the walls portioned into family compartments. A steam bath was connected to the main house. The archaeologist William Workman (1971) provides a good description of the archaeological remains of such a house located on the lower Tazlina River. Facing the river, and oriented roughly east-west, the main room was a rectangular depression about one foot deep and measuring 18 by 20 feet. The steam bath in the rear of the house was deeper, about two or three feet, and measured 15 by 11.5 feet. Excavated dirt was carefully mounded around the edges of the house. Archaeologists found a number of large stone cobbles probably used to heat the steam bath. Several families lived in a house, including the

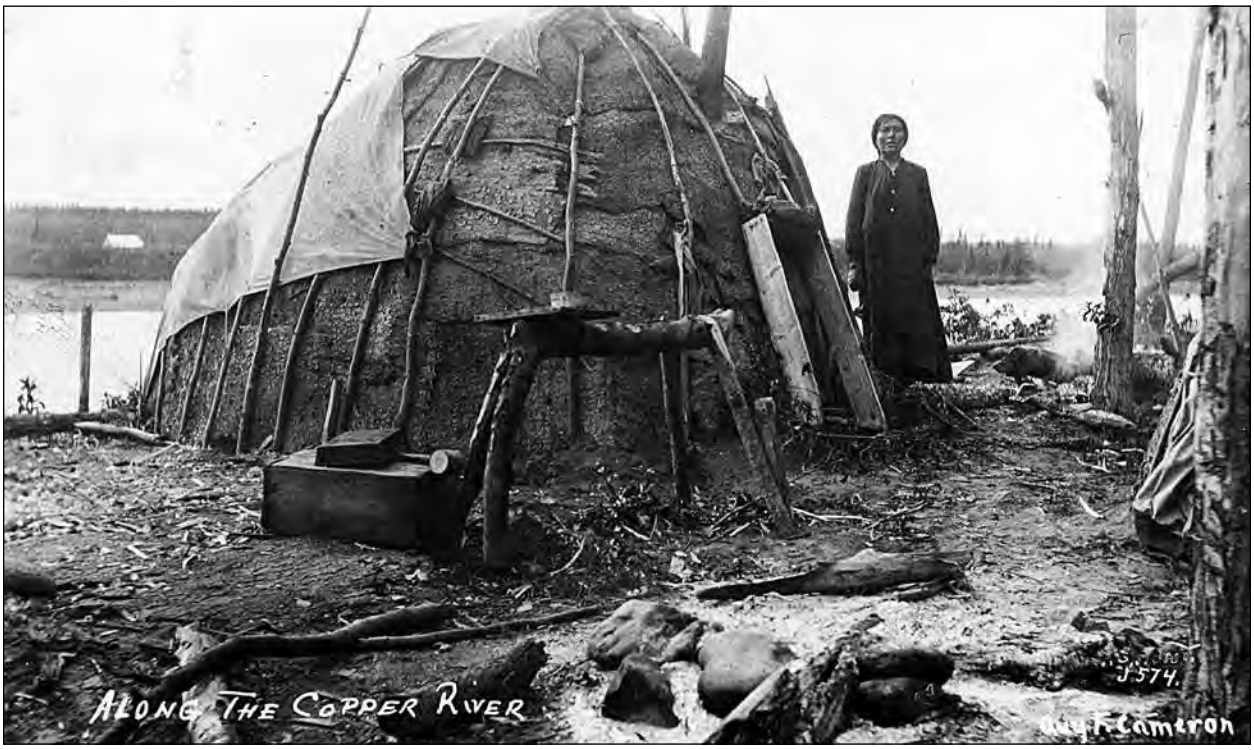


Figure 29: Ahtna house, about 1905. This bark-covered house was probably used for secluding young women during their puberty training. Photo by Guy F. Cameron. Geoffrey Bleakley Collection, Makawao, Hawaii, 2013.

Figure 30: Group of people (probably the family of Ahtna Chief Goodlataw) standing in front of structure, Copper River area, Alaska. Crary-Henderson Collection, Anchorage Museum, B1962.001.911.

chief, his several wives, their children, and the chief's brothers-in-law, who acted as retainers. There were also drudges who did most of the work. Unmarried men slept in the steam bath, women slept under the platforms, while their husbands slept above. Bacille George said "Each woman, just like room inside the house, they put bunk. Woman sleep down below, under the bunk. Women never sleep on the bunk. No lady like that, only men and just young kids." George added "Old timer never sleeps with his wife. Woman got her own room. Sometimes a man sleep on top bunk, against the law to sleep with woman, bad luck. Old time me never do that" (de Laguna and Guédon 1968, Box 8.1, 7.10.68).

DEATH

In the past, corpses of the deceased were cremated. Martha and Arthur Jackson explained that as soon as a man died, or was killed in battle, his corpse was cremated. They did not know when people began to bury the body. They also said that in the past, graves were grouped according to relation [clan] but that now they are all mixed up (de Laguna and Guédon 1968, Box 8.1, 7.3.68).

When a person died, it was the responsibility of the non-relatives, typically members of the opposite moiety, to dress and dispose of the corpse, while the relatives of the deceased mourned. After the body was disposed of, either through cremation or burial, relatives of the deceased held a potlatch, during which they distributed food and gifts to members of the opposite clan and especially to those people who had taken an active part in the burial of the corpse. If the deceased's relatives could afford it, they held another potlatch a year or more later in memory of the dead. The potlatch was not only a religious

ceremony, as described in Chapter 6, but also an important vehicle for gaining personal prestige. It was one way for young men to publicly prove their worth.

Figure 31: Andy Brown, originally from Chitina, at Copper Center; August 8, 1968. Alaska State Library, Frederica de Laguna Photo Collection, P350-68-9-17.

AHTNA LEADERSHIP

Traditional Ahtna society was hierarchical, with "rich men" and their families at the top. Ben Neeley (1987) said old-time chiefs were not young, or inexperienced, but dynamic, charismatic, and wise regarding the proper relationship between humans and their environment. Their achievements were considered superlative, and they acted as models of exemplary behavior by providing for large numbers of people. Using the word "chief," Ahtna elder Andy Brown described the central role of the leader as a provider and role model: "Every village got one chief. That man take care of the whole village. Everything depends on just that one man. Chiefs were boss for their same relation [i.e., their fellow clansmen]" (de Laguna and McClellan 1958, Box 6.1, 7.22.58).

There were different "grades" or levels of leadership. "Big chiefs" had influence over several villages, while "little chiefs" or "sub-chiefs" had a just a few men working for them. Rich men were clan leaders, but not always shamans or sleep doctors. However, all leaders had to have some power – not only coercive power, but also the ability to plug into or interface with the unseen world of a living environment.

Lesser *kaskae* or "little chiefs" had to seek the advice and counsel of more important *denae* or *kaskae* before taking any action, otherwise there could be trouble. Bacille George explained:

> Head guy, one chief, one relation, maybe all the way up from Chitina up this way. That's the boss. The rest of it he got little chief in every village. And if anything wrong he [the little chief] go see the head guy.
>
> If he don't tell the big chief, he's gonna have bad luck. Gotta ask another big chief, or he's gonna be in trouble, if he do something (de Laguna and Guédon 1968, Box 6.1, 8.28.58).

Denae and *kaskae* were clan leaders. There was often one dominant clan in a village, and the chief was the leader of that clan. Each chief and his clan are part of the oral record kept by the elders. Frank Stickwan said that the only the "highest people" were remembered in this way: "Just the highest people that's all we talk [about]. That's their own village, they take care of, their own village you know" (Kari 1986, 54).

The *denae* and his immediate family were the most important people in a community. Lieutenant Allen (1887, 135) thought Ahtna society was divided into four classes of people: *denae* and *kaskae*, who

Allen called "Tyones," were at the top. Below the chief and his immediate family were *ciile'* (Allen heard the word as "skillie"), near relatives of the *denae* or *kaskae*, and sleep doctors or shamans (*tetaesen*)[3]. On the other hand, Stephen Strong's (1972) dissertation about Mentasta claimed that sleep doctors often had a high-ranking position and were frequently associated with a particular *kaskae* or *denae*. At the lowest level were drudges (*'elnaa*) in varying degrees of servitude. In the literature, drudges are sometimes referred to as "slaves," but they were not the property of the *denae* or *kaskae*. Allen was struck by the extreme differentiation between the classes. He wrote "the tyones[4] would barely condescend to consider any of us their equals; nor did they fail to express disgust at seeing the head of our party carrying a pack or pulling a rope" (Allen 1887, 135).

Allen's observation, while perhaps exaggerated and somewhat distorted, gives us a picture of Ahtna society that agrees with reports of later explorers, such as Abercrombie (1900, 404–405) and Castner (1900, 705), and is supported by Ahtna elders. Pete Ewan said only the rich were looked up to and only they had an abundance of food, which they were expected to share. Ewan said "long time ago they don't call poor people, don't look after them. Only rich people they look after."

> Not much good living or not much good eat. Rich people, [had] all kinds of food. Rich people, everybody eats with him. Each time people come by, they eat with him. They just go where rich man lives. They don't come to poor person like me, they come from way up, long way, they hear about him (they come only during hard times) (de Laguna and McClellan 1960, Box 7.4, 8.4.60).

Ahtna elder Fanny Sthienfield described the difference between a *denae* and *kaskae*. *Denae* were the principal leaders, while *kaskae* were their spokesmen. Sthienfield said "[t]here's two names [for leaders]: kaskae' and denae. Kaskae' is smart talking. Denae he just lay around there, and whatever he say, and kaskae' gonna talk for him" (de Laguna and McClellan 1958, Box 6.4, 7.18.58). Nick Jackson (2016) said the father of a child could be referred to as a *kaskae* because he spoke for the child. Larger villages had both a *denae* and *kaskae*, while smaller villages were led by a *kaskae*.

Denae could be considered a kind of "landed gentry." Called *nen'kè hwdenae'*, or "on-the-land person," they were always associated with a specific place. Ahtna elder Annie Ewan said *denae* were "[b]ig chief, like somebody live in a place for years. Like somebody born there and died there in that place is more important. A rich man" (de Laguna and McClellan 1960, Box 7.4, 8.4.60).

Denae held titles composed of a place name followed by either *ghaxen* or *denen*.[5] At Mentasta Lake, for example, the *denae* held the title *Mendaes Ghaxen* or "Persons of Shallow Lake." The Ahtna recognized at least seventeen chief's titles: eight located in Lower Ahtna territory, six in Central Ahtna territory, one in Western Ahtna territory, and two in Upper Ahtna territory (Kari 1986).

Lieutenant Allen (1887) thought four *denae* controlled the entire upper Copper River. Nicolai was in charge of the Chitina River and Taral, while two other chiefs, *Bes Cene Denen* ("Person of Riverbank Flat") and *Nic'akuni'aa Denen* ("Person of Where Land Extends Out") controlled the river between Taral and the mouth of the Tazlina River. *Bets'ulnii Ta'* ("Father of Someone Respects Him"), who probably held the title *Stl'aa C'aegge Ghaxen* ("Person of Rear River Mouth"), was headman among the upper Ahtna.

Like the *denae*, a *kaskae's* reputation was based on his personality, managerial skills, and generosity. As "talkers" or "lawyers," they defended their fellow clansmen in disputes. Bacille George said,

[3]Allen's assertion that sleep doctors were actually a class below *cille'* is dubious, especially given the fact that many *denae* were sleep doctors themselves. The hierarchical structure was based on clan membership.

[4]The word *tyone*, borrowed from the Sakha/Russian languages, means chief or leader.

[5]Note that *denen*, as used in the titles here, derives from an entirely different linguistic root than *denae*. *Denen* is from the root word *den*, meaning "specific place," whereas *denae* is a noun meaning "man" or "person" (Kari 2022).

"They talk. *Kaskae*, that means talk. He talks for *denae* and tells you what you gonna do. He tells everybody what to do for living" (de Laguna and McClellan 1958, Box 6.1, 8.28.58).

The female counterpart to a *denae* was a *kuy'aa* or "rich woman." Women were not considered *kaskae* or *denae*, but the word *kuy'aa* alludes to the potential leadership and hierarchy in which certain women were considered rich and above everyone else. Like the *denae,* a rich woman's reputation rested on being energetic, generous, and knowledgeable. According to Bacille George, "rich woman. They got like records – big name just for the name, big name. Big shot" (de Laguna and McClellan 1958, Box 6.1, 8.28.58).

Ben Neeley (1987) said that women were not chiefs but that some women took the lead in activities, such as teaching young girls how to make moccasins, tan skin, take care of fish, pick berries, and store food for winter. In fact, much of what was counted as wealth – food, skins, and clothing – came from the labor of women.

Besides the *denae* and *kaskae,* there were two special types of leaders: war chiefs and healers or persons associated with supernatural power. Most *denae* and *kaskae* possessed supernatural power, but they were usually not war leaders. A war chief was called *c'eghann tse'*, which is a combination of *c'eghann*, the word for war, and *tse',* the word for "ahead" or "first." War chiefs were not full-time leaders but acted only in times of war. Healers or people connected to the supernatural were called *c'ededliinen*, meaning "one who sings"; *dyenen*, translated as "shaman" or "medicine person"; and *tetaesen,* literally "sleep doctor."

The household of a *denae* or *kaskae* consisted of his wives and children, young men related to the chief, along with their wives, and drudges who did all the household chores such as packing water and wood. Drudges were often orphans, widows, or people captured in war. Allen (1887, 136) wrote that the drudges were at the beck and call of the chief and his relatives.

> I have seen one 14 or 15 years of age, sitting within a few feet of the river, order a man 6 feet high, a vassal to bring him water. These menials are used for all kinds of work, and are completely under the control of their masters as possibly could be, yet I have never heard of corporal punishment being administered to them.

The way to power and wealth was based, in part, on a person's training. Huston Sanford told a story about Ahtna ideals of hard work and luck that make for a successful life. A young orphan boy was being raised by his uncle, but the boy was lazy so his uncle beat him. The boy ran away and cried. God, or *Nek'altaenn* ("the one who moves above us"), spoke to the boy, and asked why he was crying. The boy said he was "worthless," he had a hard time cutting wood and trapping. God blessed the boy and removed the impurity of laziness. The boy then went back to his uncle and began working, cutting wood and trapping. Eventually, through hard work, and the luck bestowed by *Nek'altaenn*, the boy became wealthy. Because his uncle had beaten him four times, the boy made four potlatches for his uncle. Sanford finished by saying that the boy in this story served as a role model and that upon hearing the story Huston became "aware" (Kari 1986, 27–33).

Hard work and skill were important to a *denae*'s success, but luck was equally significant. *Luck* in the English language is defined as success or failure brought about by chance rather than through one's own actions. In the Ahtna tradition luck is made or acquired by following the rules, by knowing what is *'engii*, or forbidden. Luck can also be taken away or negated as when a hunter, for example, comes into contact with a young girl in her menstrual cycle.

The word *'engii* is translated as "forbidden" or "taboo" but refers to an entire system of beliefs that includes a set of rules, restrictions, and rituals that governs every aspect of a person's daily life from hunting, to interacting with a person of the opposite sex, to taking a bath and brushing one's teeth.*'Engii* is the moral underpinning of Ahtna culture. It is the covenant or agreement between all living things that make it possible for humans to survive.

Figure 32: 'Atnahwt'aene from the Klutina River. The handwritten caption on the photograph indicates it was taken in 1898 at the height of the gold rush. Courtesy of the Valdez Museum & Historical Archive, Wulff (Barry) Collection.

Luck was one source of power; knowledge was another. Ben Neeley (1987) described some aspects of this knowledge. Leaders were noted for their knowledge of clan histories and ability to recite the achievements of important ancestors, which Neeley referred to as "background." Ahtna chiefs were distinguished by their ability to talk in a special language called "chief's talk" used in potlatches and trade. Their knowledge of clan histories and ability to talk were essential when different chiefs met one another at gatherings such as potlatches:

> Oh, that's Indian ways. Every how to live, how to survive. How to make money and tell us how to speak. Everything else and how to talk, and some lot of village come [together], another chief come around talk to them, he gotta have a background how to answer too. That's what they used to in old days. How to answer, how the background used to be. They make speech, they talk to each other and that's when sometimes more smart, this one not get called down. Just like lawyer. Lawyer got to win the case. They always think about how they going to call each other down, more smart, they want study more about their backgrounds (Neeley 1987).

Much of the knowledge held by the *denae* was secret. Neeley (n.d.) said that *denae* and *kaskae* were smart, but they kept their knowledge to themselves.

> Oh yes, smart man too. Them days is all secret. Secret people. You don't talk to another people too, [don't] talk next door too. They don't want nobody know from them, they keep

> for themselves too everything that's good. That's the way people used to be. That's why people wise, you gotta make it your way, you gotta do it your way. You gotta make your way to live. They don't tell others. Different relations, kids, they don't tell them too. That's only [tell] their father, might tell something they know. That's the kind used to be early days.

A chief's power was also dependent on the amount of social support received from his clansmen. Each *denae* or *kaskae* had an entourage of young men who carried out his orders and did all the manual labor. These helpers were called *ciile*' (translated as "brother" or "male parallel cousin"). Joe Goodlataw said these boys were trained by the *denae*. They would get up at four in the morning to collect wood, and they were taught various skills such as carving wooden bowls (de Laguna and McClellan 1954, Box 5.1; 6.30.54). According to Bacille George:

> The chief got own men with him all the time, like soldiers. When he say 'take that man. Kill him!' they do it. He gonna be there – to carry out the chief's orders. […]
>
> Denae, [had] his nephews [sister's sons] and grand nephews with him. They are with him and they work for the denae. And he feed them, give them something to eat. And they fish in the river, making dry fish and put 'em away. And go out hunting. Kill moose, caribou, smoke all meat so no fly come in. They cut it thin and make 'em smoke good so it's dry – just the outside. They make a big place and dry four of five moose. They good taste, can't spoil. They have lots of cache way out in the bush where nobody know. Maybe four or five. The war people clean up the camp sometime. That's why somebody hide the cache way out in the woods with no trail. They don't want to go hungry. And they put the dentalium down in the ground and cover it up so nobody see it (de Laguna and McClellan 1954, Box 5.4; 8.5.54).

Chiefs often had more than one wife who contributed to their husbands' wealth by processing skins and making clothes. According to Martha Jackson, "Rich man can marry more than one wife. Sometimes they marry sisters, sometimes women from different clans" (de Laguna and McClellan 1958, Box 6.3, 7.7.58). By marrying women from different clans, chiefs increased or reinforced their political standing and were able to attract followers, particularly brothers-in-law who acted as his retainers.

Wealth was measured in food, skins, clothes, and tools that a rich man could give away in support of his relatives and the poor. Martha Jackson explained that a rich man gets rich by killing "lots of moose, ducks, fish. No law that time, he eats what he wants" (de Laguna and McClellan 1958, Box 6.3, 7.7.58). When asked how a man got to be chief, Annie Ewan similarly said "they kill lots of moose. Get rich out of them." (de Laguna and McClellan 1960, Box 7.4; 8.4.60).

A person increased his social status and wealth not by hoarding wealth but by giving it away. Ben Neeley (1987) said that people would support a rich man who was nice and not stingy. "They don't want no stingy. Smart chief, the one they like. That one easy, honored, kind, that's the people likes it." The *denae* was expected to meet the needs of his followers on a daily basis but also to hold potlatches.

A major responsibility of the chief was to mediate disputes. One way to settle disputes was to pay restitution; another was with violence. Payments could be made to settle offenses ranging from theft to murder. If restitution was not made, the situation could escalate, resulting in revenge killings. But if a *denae* "got lots of dentalium and guns etc. he talk to chief, [because he] got lots of pieces to pay for that body. So they have trial – and then they can decide to settle dispute with stuff" (de Laguna and McClellan 1958, Box 6.1, 8.28.58).

However, Andy Brown pointed out that if the parties could not resolve their differences through restitution and the aggrieved party "wanted to kill man back," then one alternative was to kill the murderer, even if he happened to be your own brother.

> Then I gonna kill my own brother. Then no more talk. If I kill him then nobody can fight against me no more. If my brother kill somebody and somebody killed him in revenge I might get mad and kill somebody else back and more war. That's why our own brother kill 'em. People no more talk (de Laguna and McClellan 1958, Box 6.1, 8.1.58).

It was the responsibility of the *denae* or *kaskae* to see that restitution was made, and if a poor person could not pay, then his *denae* had to pay. If a man got into trouble and had no relatives or leader to talk for him, that man could be made a drudge or slave. But, as Andy Brown explains, his relatives could ransom that man.

> All right, some man got no [leader], get in trouble. No body help then they can make him a slave. But if his clan relations find out the headman or [leader] of his clan can say why did you make this man a slave? "Why you [en]slave my people." Sometime pay, give them *c'enk'one'* (dentalium shell necklace). They give it that and don't say no more, nothing. And then man free (de Laguna and McClellan 1958, Box 6.1, 8.1.58).

A chief's reputation was based on this ability to feed and take care of his people. To do this, the chief and his wife organized and oversaw the production of most foods. He told the young men where and when to hunt, and supervised harvest practices and amounts to ensure that meat was not wasted. He directed the construction and maintenance of fish weirs and traps, and that of corrals and fences used to take caribou and moose.

The position of Ahtna chiefs was enhanced with the start of the Russian fur trade. Beginning in the nineteenth century, certain Ahtna chiefs organized trips to Russian trading posts located on Cook Inlet or at Nuchek on Hinchinbrook Island in Prince William Sound. These trips were difficult and often hazardous. Those chiefs living closest to the trade routes controlled the trade because they controlled the trails. Both the Russian-American Company and the Russian Orthodox Church had policies for identifying individual leaders with whom they could conduct business. The Russian term for these leaders was *toion*, often rendered in English as *tyone*. Russian "business" involved both trading of furs and conversion to Christianity.

Some of the most renowned traders were Chief Nicolai, who held the title *Taghael Denen*, and *Sałtigi Ghaxen*, leader at Tyone Lake. As the trade developed, these men became rich in trade goods, which they used to stage big potlatches, thus increasing the value of their names. Ben Neeley (n.d.) remembered that Chief Tyone and his people made frequent trips to the American trading post at Knik. Neeley said once they got to the trading post, one Ahtna was selected to as spokesman or "trading post man."

> Russian days they call "Chief Dayaan," leader. He used to go down, trading down at Knik, Knik trading post. He used to go down that way. Whole Tyone bunch and go down that way and when they come to city, stopping, they going to have trading post man, gotta have one leader. He [trader] make one leader for people. So that's how Russian name him Dayaan, is a lot of Dayann from Tyone Lake area. This guy, he was rich man.

Morrie Secondchief (1988) remembered that when Chief Tyone was a child his uncle became one of the "first fur buyer" making trips down to Cook Inlet to trade furs for tea, sugar, and ammunition, which he later traded to other Ahtna. Later, Chief Tyone himself followed in his uncle's footsteps and organized expeditions to Cook Inlet where he traded furs for tea, sugar, ammunition, and tobacco, which he then sold or traded elsewhere. According to Secondchief, people really went for these items, but they did not like flour, which they did not know how to use.

Often, the chief assembled all the furs that had been trapped by his men, as well as furs taken by other Ahtna living farther up the Copper River and people from the upper Tanana River. Bacille George recalled that young men, under the direction of the chief, packed the furs down the Copper River to Prince

William Sound. They would go in moose-skin boats. When they got back, they would set up a store with all the things they had brought back and trade things such as tea, sugar, and gunpowder for furs and tanned skins. Everybody had to obey the chief, but some exceptional young men would trade on their own, thinking they could get a better price (de Laguna and McClellan 1954, Box 5.3, 6.27.54).

TRANSITION

The roles and responsibilities of the traditional leadership were diminished and done away with by the 1920s. Gloria Stickwan (2018) provided a synopsis of the changes that she thought had occurred in Ahtna leadership:

> The practice of selecting a traditional chief ended which greatly changed Ahtna People's way of life. Chiefs talked for the people. Told them where to hunt. He talked to settle disputes. All of this changed when Chiefs were no longer chosen, until in 1988. That is when a few Ahtna elders got together and decided Ahtna People needed to have a traditional chief again. However, traditional chief's roles and responsibilities were changed. No longer does the chief tell people where to hunt, but he still is a spokesperson for all of Ahtna People. He is not a chief for a clan, but for all of Ahtna People, that role is different.
>
> Today, we have Village Council Chiefs and Presidents, and board members. Many women are on councils and are Presidents of village councils and Ahtna, Inc. Traditionally Ahtna women did not speak when important decisions were made, or if they did, not many women did speak. I heard Walya Hobson say that women did speak up and were leaders. I also heard Harry Johns say that women were not leaders. So *denae* or chiefs have evolved to women leaders in the village councils and the Ahtna Board of directors. Today women are leaders and listened to. My point, we still practice our way of life.

Ahtna leaders who grew up between 1910 and 1940 were influenced by western education, employment in the western economy, and Christianity. Beginning in the 1930s, the government forced Ahtna families to send their children away to school. Many were sent to the Wrangell Institute in Wrangell, Mt. Edgecombe High School in Sitka, or the Eklutna Indian Reserve boarding school in Eklutna. At these schools, children were forbidden to speak their Native language, taught to read and write English, and taught about American culture and values. Attendance at boarding schools meant that students often lost or forgot their culture and language and more quickly assimilated into nonnative American culture than their parents and siblings who remained in the villages. But attendance at school also meant students received an education that proved to be useful in the long-term struggle to assert Native people's rights.

Employment played a similar role by helping future Ahtna leaders to develop many of the skills that enabled them to be successful in the outside world. Employment also provided the money with which to become politically active. By the 1950s, many of the new Ahtna leaders had obtained jobs. Many worked for the Alaska Road Commission, such as Henry Bell, Lloyd Bell, Frank Billum, Harry Billum, Walter Charley, Oscar Craig, Fred Ewan, Harry Johns, Robert Marshall, Ben Neeley, Markle Pete. All of these men became involved in the development of local Native organizations and the Native land claims movement.

In the nineteenth century many Ahtna accepted the Russian Orthodox religion, and influential leaders such as Chief Andrew had become self-proclaimed priests. Orthodox influence began to wane in the early twentieth century, however. Due to lack of funds, the church ignored Ahtna requests to build chapels in the Copper River basin and allowed missionary efforts among the Ahtna to go on hiatus (Znamenski 2003, 56). In the 1930s, when nondenominational Christian missionaries began arriving in the Copper Basin, the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church dwindled rapidly. Many of the new Ahtna leaders, such as Harry Johns, became pastors in the new Protestant churches. The leadership that emerged at the beginning of the land claims movement in the 1950s looked nothing like the *denae* or

kaskae, but leaders were still expected to be role models and to follow tradition, as well as act as good Christians. As middle-aged leaders faced the conflicts of religion and tradition, younger men experienced the shifting political climate of the late 1950s. These young people were the last bilingual generation of the Ahtna, and they were the last generation to grow up with many of the old ways.

Many young leaders were chosen by circumstance rather than tradition. Those established in the wage economy and aided by equal opportunity initiatives of the 1960s had the means to lobby for the Ahtna and consult with elders on activism. This was a significant period of cross-generational effort as traditional elders groomed a younger generation to lead during this dynamic time of change and transformation.

Figure 33: Chief Goodlataw. Crary-Henderson Collection, Anchorage Museum, B1962.001A.137.

As Ahtna culture changed, so did the role of women. In the past, there were rich women who had status and power, but in general women were considered subordinate to men. When the men went away to work in the summer, however, their wives, sisters, mothers, and sweethearts filled the gap and kept things going. As Ina Lincoln (2007) put it, "women held it all together;" they "took care of the kids, made the clothes, cooked, fished and processed the fish." Since the 1950s, women have gained positions of political and economic power. They have been elected to village councils, and today a woman, Michelle Anderson, is president of Ahtna, Inc. Some of the most prominent people in recent Ahtna history have been women, including Katie John, Ruby John, Lena Charley (one of the first female big game guides), and Christine (Yazzie) Craig, who became the first female president of Ahtna, Inc.

As Stickwan (2018) noted above, in the late 1980s a group of Ahtna elders decided the Ahtna people needed a traditional chief, and they selected Jim McKinley. Later, Harry Johns, Ben Neeley, and Fred Ewan also became traditional chiefs. Unlike a *denae* or *kaskae* of old, the modern traditional chief has no political or economic role and is not a clan leader; he is a culture bearer, a person who embodies traditional Ahtna culture and speaks for all Ahtna.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The colonization of the Ahtna homeland after the gold rush of 1898 diminished and eventually brought about the disappearance of Ahtna traditional leadership structures, centered around men who held total authority and were the economic and political linchpins of the culture. This decline in the role and status of traditional leaders coincided with the imposition of western political institutions and the growth of

federal and state bureaucracies ostensibly designed to manage all economic, social, and political aspects of Ahtna life. The corporate structure that ANCSA introduced was new to the Ahtna and had a leadership model based on western institutions and values. This contributed to further changes in how Ahtna understood the role of traditional leadership within a new institutional landscape in which corporate leadership now played a large role.

Today, Ahtna have a traditional chief who is selected by the elders to represent the living tradition of Ahtna culture but is nothing like a *kaskae* or *denae*. There is a strict separation between the traditional leadership, which represents Ahtna tradition, and administrative and business leadership. Administrative leaders, including village council presidents, are elected officials whose purview is limited to running village governments. Business leaders run Ahtna, Inc., and have a fiduciary responsibility to shareholders. Modern leaders reflect the changes in Ahtna culture. First, the role of women has changed: women are now prominent leaders. Second, as the Ahtna responded and adjusted to colonialism, traditional leadership simply faded. It was not until after World War II that new leaders emerged to deal with outsiders and assert Ahtna rights to lands and resources. These leaders developed in an environment in which the kind of knowledge possessed by *kaskae* or *denae* was not a prerequisite for running a village or a corporation.

Table 6: Names of some *kaskae*, *denae*, and other leading men in Ahtna oral tradition.

Title/Ahtna name	Translation/English name	Notes
Scołta	"Father of Scołta"	Tolsona Creek
Ts'i'sc'elaes Ta'	"Father of we throw things out"	Near outlet of Tazlina Lake.
Kluaaghe Ta'	"Father of on their behalf"	Kaina River
Ta'e'Idahwdetnes Ta'	"Father of there is a sound toward him"	Mouth of Mendeltna Creek. Three other named men also stayed there: Sc'et'exen, Stakolc'eł, and Baniłtah.
Ni'sdela' Ta'	"Father of puts things there"	Nikolai Lake
Nesteni Uta'	"Father of frozen face."	Nikolai Lake
C'ec'adax	"Things drop down"	Old Man Lake
Nihwneldiił Ta'	"Father of ? turning red again"	Lake Louise
Cae'e Denen	"River Mouth Person"	Chief at Gulkana
Sdaghaay Denen	"Point Person"	Chief at Staghaayden, a village located at the mouth of the Chetaslina River. Andy Brown and Mrs. McKinley said Sdaghaay Denen. "Chetaslina chief is called Sdaghaay Denen because that's his same village. He was naltsina chief." Tsedi Kulaenden "that's another chief." He was naltsina too."
Xadadezyaas Ta'	"Father of ascending talking"	
Ni'ilyaas Ta'	"Father of families."	Sałtigi (Sun Bump)
Kadadeyaas Ta'		
U'eł yayaał Ta'	"Father of he walks with him"	Stayed at Tyone Lake. U'eł yayaał Ta' is chief Tyone, father of Jim, Jack and Johnny Tyone. Chief Tyone was full brother to Mrs. Secondchief's grandfather (Nele', Neeley?), and Sabon. The Sabons' great grandpa came from Tyone Lake. Taltsiine was the dominant clan. They raise Tsisyu children – so Taltsiine men married Tsisyu women.

Table 6 continued

Title/Ahtna name	Translation/English name	Notes
Ts'iidak'aał Ta'	"Father of filing it off"	
Ba' ane 'Scspring 'eye-lyass Ta'	"Father of someone brings things from beyond [Ahtna country]"	
C'enih	"He says something"	
Baniłyiidadaxen	Chief Jim Tyone	
U'ekałdesen	John Tyone	
Ts'e' C'udetniisen	Talkeetna Stephan	
Uk'a' Kol Ta'	"Father of his gun is gone"	Chief at Hogan Hill
U'eł Ghalii Ta'	"Father of wealth is with him"	Oscar Ewan's father
Tsaał K'aas	"He trains the Chinook Wind"	Upper Ahtna war leader
Nitggaas Ta'	"Father of he turns grey."	Stayed at Bes Cene;[17] reportedly the richest man there. Andy Brown's uncle.
Hwc'ele'Ta Ik'e Ngedzeni	"Father of rags is standing upon it;" Doc Billum	Lower Tonsina
C'iiłgheli	Chief Andrew (Nitsisyu clan)	
	Anasi Stickwan	*Naltsina* clan – Jim McKinley's grandfather
Taghael Denen (title)	Chief Bacille	
U'eł'Sc'ediy' Ta'	Hanagita, Eskalida	*Udzisyu* clan
C'utl'ata'	Chief Goodlataw	

[17]There are two Ahtna habitation sites called *Bes Cene*, both in Lower Ahtna traditional territory. The *Bes Cene* referred to here is almost certainly the one near present-day Kenny Lake, also known as Riverstag Village. See Chapter 8, site 23.

CHAPTER 5: LIVING WITH THE LAND

INTRODUCTION

Near the end of his book *Make Prayers to the Raven*, the anthropologist Richard Nelson (1983, 238–239) wrote that his clear and certain comprehension of the natural world had ended. Fundamental assumptions about the nature of nature were thrown into doubt, and he concluded "[is] there not a single reality in the natural world, and absolute and universal reality? Apparently the answer to this question is no." As Nelson observed, Koyukon beliefs are so vastly different that many people may have trouble appreciating their power and substantiality and pass them off as quaint folklore or pure fantasy.

Most Americans understand nature to be distinct or separate from human beings. Christianity teaches that humans are created in the image of God and are meant to dominate nature. Animals are driven by instinct, have no reason, and are not sentient or aware. Nature is grand, passive, and mechanical, the backdrop for the intentionality of human beings (Tsing 2015).

Modern science divides the world into discrete, clear-cut categories: nature/culture and natural/supernatural. For most people in the modern world there is only one nature, but many cultural interpretations of that nature. Through science, considered culture-free and based on pure reason, we can discover and know the one true nature.

As Nelson learned from his Koyukon teachers, these basic assumptions are questionable. In anthropology this has become known as the "ontological turn" (Costa and Fausto 2010). Broadly speaking ontology is the study of the "nature of being" or "the study of reality" (Kohn 2015). The question posed is whether there is a multicultural world with a single fixed nature viewed from different cultural perspectives or, alternatively, a multinatural world with many different natures (Blaser 2009). Analysis has shifted from the study of "culture" as a set of social conventions and institutions toward interactions among humans, animals, plants, physical processes, artifacts, and other forms of being (Descola 2020).

In a multinatural world, the environment is historically contingent. When Ahtna elders talk about their lives and the lives of their parents and grandparents, they are talking about a specific environment, one different from today, a world without colonialism or capitalism, without towns, roads, and grocery stores, a seemingly empty land. In this world humans created a life that embraced the stillness and the presence of powerful animals who, unlike humans, were contained unto themselves, had no need of anything outside of themselves, who could be seen and unseen, and could destroy humans. To live, humans had to learn to know animals, to feel them, to intuit them. In the process, humans learned that animals were like them, but more powerful because they are everything unto themselves. To survive, humans had to be attentive and cultivate awareness, maintain a proper attitude, and follow protocol. One could not simply say or do anything one pleased.

CONSERVATION PRACTICES

In *Make Prayers to the Raven*, Nelson (1983) describes Koyukon conservation practices within the boreal forest ecology where resources fluctuate in availability, cycle in productivity, are accessible only at specific times of the year, and occur in specific locations. Change, not stability, is the norm in this demanding environment. Koyukon attribute almost all change in the physical environment to actions and reactions that take place in the spiritual world. Declines in wildlife, for example, are attributed to past offenses against protecting animal spirits. Animals respond by making themselves scarce or staying aloof (Nelson 1983, 210). Koyukon adapted to this uncertainty and instability by learning to plan ahead or, as Nelson (1983, 216) phrased it, making the "intellectual crossing, from the impulse of the immediate to the ethic of the future." The Koyukon "ethic of conservation" is based on four strategies: territory and range, attitude toward predators, avoiding waste and, "sustained yield practices."

Some of the conservation practices discussed by Nelson would resonate with scientifically trained resource managers, but there is a distinction between the ideas that underpin government-bureaucratic

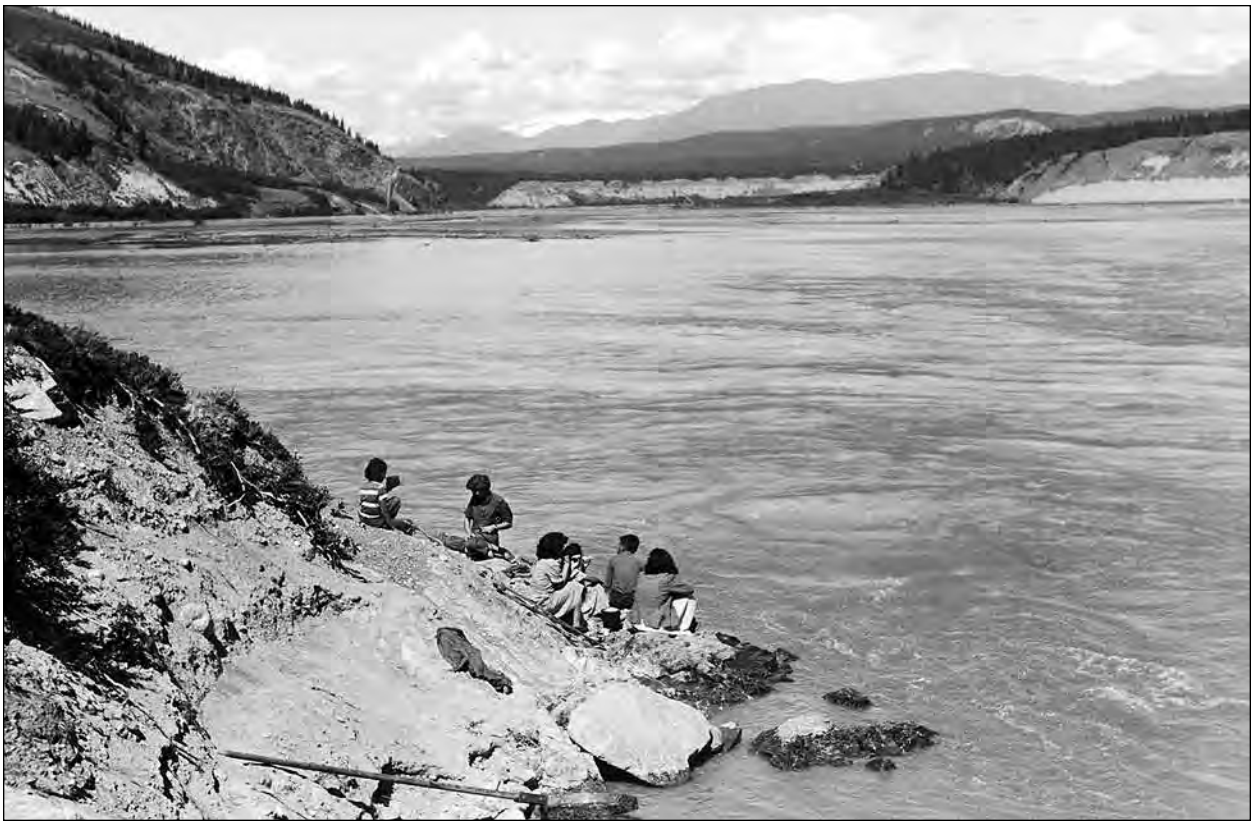


Figure 34: Ahtna picnicking at fishing site, near Chitina, 1954. Alaska State Library, Frederica de Laguna Photo Collection, P350-54-8-36.

conservation and Indigenous conservation. The attention or focus of government-bureaucratic-scientific conservation is on the number of animals, their size and age, and the season or period when they can be taken. Decision-making by management agencies is based on scientific studies of animal behavior, population dynamics, and so on. Once the facts of an animal population are established, quotas and catch limits are put in place to regulate human hunting and harvesting behavior. Animals are considered to have no volition of their own, they are moved by nature or instinct. They are without agency; their behavior can be understood in terms of facts and predictions rather than as expressions of agents whose presence is based on relations with humans. By contrast, in many Indigenous traditions animals are present only if humans respect them. Animals have agency, and can make themselves available or not, depending on whether or not they are respected (*cf*. Blaser 2009).

For hunters, mobility is essential. When resources are abundant, hunters can limit their movements and leave certain areas unharvested. When resources are scarce, hunters must range widely across territories. Only with the introduction of traplines did territories became exclusive domains. According to Nelson (1983), Koyukon neither limit nor manage predators such as wolves, because they do not consider wolves a threat to game populations. For contemporary Koyukon, the only predators that adversely affect wildlife populations are other humans, primarily nonnative hunters from urban areas. Koyukon go to great lengths to avoid wasting anything for fear of offending the protecting animal spirits. Lastly, Koyukon limit or control their harvests so as to produce a sustained yield; for example, they avoid taking young animals and plants.

The Ahtna "ethic of conservation" rests on similar principles of territoriality, attitude toward predators, avoidance of waste, and "sustained yield practices." Ethnographic evidence as well as historical literature indicate that in the nineteenth century, Ahtna had a system of well-defined territories in which

kin groups claimed inherent rights to specific territories that included fish camps and upland hunting areas (Reckord 1983a, 24), as described in Chapter 2. Territorial boundaries were firmly enforced, and outsiders had to seek permission before trespassing on another group's ground (*cf*. Abercrombie 1900, 598; Castner 1900, 703–704; McClellan 1975a, 227; Reckord 1983b, 77).

As mentioned above in the discussion of leadership, a specific clan was often attached to a particular territory, and clan leaders managed resources in their territory by telling the young men where and when to hunt and regulating how much was taken to ensure that meat was not wasted. Clan leaders directed the construction and maintenance of fish weirs and traps, as well as corrals and fences used to take caribou and moose. Ben Neeley said the chief planned ahead and told the young men what to do.

> He [the chief] tell them what to do, have a bunch of young people with him and he tell them what to do. Tell him [young men] that summer going to be fishing. Summer comes just once a year and salmon come up, just come once a year, so he tell them boys to fish, to put up food. Put up this, so he talk to them to make them big place (Neeley 1987).

With the introduction of American laws, a new sense of individualism, and a changing economy, the old system of clan territories gave way to family hunting and trapping territories. As Ahtna resettled in communities along the highway, hunting territories and fishing sites, in particular, became associated with particular villages and families. Ahtna respect these boundaries, but the villages have little influence in the allocation of resources within these areas. At the same time, Ahtna continue to defend both village and regional corporation lands against trespass by non-Ahtna, Inc. shareholders – both through enforcement and by selling permits for non-shareholders to be on Ahtna lands.

Predator control was not a traditional practice; Ahtna believed wolves must not be killed if it could be avoided. Jim McKinley said:

> There is lots of history on wolves. Where he walk in the winter time, when you see his track in winter or anything don't touch. Don't put your cane on it in winter or anything. No! They tell us when we're kids. Don't touch the tracks. "Bad luck!" they said. He used to be human too, they say, that wolf. Bad luck if you step on wolf track. No snowshoes or touch with stick (de Laguna 1960 and McClellan, Box 7.3, 7.25.60).

Attitudes towards wolves and predator control have changed. When wolf pelts became valuable, the Ahtna altered their beliefs and began trapping wolves. They also became involved in predator control when the government began offering bounties for wolves and wolf pups. It was a way of making ends meet, and it offered some economic diversification at a time when most Ahtna still depended almost entirely on hunting, fishing, and regional trade.

Self-limiting the harvest is a fundamental aspect of traditional stewardship or self-regulation. To intentionally waste an animal is tantamount to sin because waste is considered offensive to the animal's spirit and results in making the animals aloof or impossible to kill. Ahtna have considerable knowledge of animal behavior, and they know that most encounters with animals are a result of chance. Success in hunting involves two important concepts: "luck" (*ses* in the Ahtna language; translated as safety, protection, or luck) and *'engii* (loosely translated as "that which is forbidden"). Without "luck" a hunter cannot be successful, and his success depends on his knowing what is *'engii*.

Luck in the English language is defined as success or failure brought by chance rather than one's own actions. In the Ahtna tradition, luck is made or acquired by following the rules, by knowing what is *'engii*. Conversely, luck can be taken away or negated—for example, because of failing to follow proscriptions around the treatment of specific animals. In essence, luck is protection against misfortune and is obtained by having a connection with the spiritual power that animates all living things.

Figure 35: Kate and John Ewan, in front of their cache in Gulkana. Geoffrey Bleakley Collection, Makawao, Hawaii, 2014030.

There are various ways to acquire this connection. In order to please the salmon, Ahtna fishers used to carve fish tails into the handles of their dip nets. Children were given amulets to obtain connections to specific animals and to acquire that animal's particular qualities. For example, beaver claws were tied around a child's wrist to increase their ability to chop wood, or, as Ahtna elder Andy Brown explained, luck in hunting moose can be obtained by cutting the moose's right eyeball and smearing the black substance inside of it around the hunter's wrists. Brown said "they do that when we kids. And when we shoot moose, we kill it fast" (de Laguna and McClellan 1960, Box 7.5, 8.20.60).

Some people are understood to be predisposed to success and are thought to have a special connection with a particular animal. Andy Brown said some men were said to be a "friend to moose" with a special empathy or understanding that enabled them to always see and kill moose (de Laguna and McClellan 1960, Box 7.5, 8.20.60). A hunter goes out without anticipation, and an animal either lets itself be seen or not. The animal's presence is based on its sense of the hunter so the encounter is reciprocal. Relations do not perpetuate themselves independently but require attention, care, and lived practice to be continued (Feit 2014).

The relationship between humans and animals is codified in a covenant governed by *'engii*. To follow *'engii* is to accept that humans are not in control while seeking to live in harmony with all things. *'Engii* governs every aspect of life from how one uses language, to butchering salmon, to giving a potlatch, to brushing one's teeth.[1] Any form of excess is considered *'engii*. A person who disregarded the rules of *'engii* was living in disharmony and would most likely die. Elder John Billum (1987) explained the meaning of *'engii* as follows:

> You know, we believe what the Indians said, you know, Indians said *'engii*. *'Engii* means that's, well that got to do with God also. Whatever God say, don't go over it, or like don't waste or not to waste anything, what God put here for food, *'engii*, don't waste, that what God gave you. That we still believe stuff like that. And don't talk bad about anything. Don't talk bad about bear, if you do that he'll come at you, might destroy your eye or cripple you

[1]Upper Tanana and Tanacross peoples have the same concept. For Upper Tanana, *ɟɟjih* covers every aspect of life including the use of language. There are linguistic restrictions of *ɟɟjih*. For example, one can never say the word "bear," but rather should use the word "our grandfather." There are also euphemisms for eliminating waste, having one's period and going hunting. One cannot say or use the possessive when referring to wild animals, for instance one can say "my dog" but not "my rabbit." *ɟɟjih* disallows the use of such language (Lovick 2020, 35–37).

Figure 36: Adam Sanford's fish wheel on Chistochina River. Sanford is watching US Fish and Wildlife biologists: Bill Bell is taking notes and Monty Gregson is weighing salmon, August 10, 1954. Alaska State Library, Frederica de Laguna Photo Collection, P350-54-11-31.

> or stuff like that. Everything that belongs to God, you know, so we don't want to talk bad about those things like that.

Ahtna developed strategies, used whenever possible, to take only animals in their prime. For example, large male Dall sheep were preferred over smaller ewes because they were fatter and provided more meat. During the rut, hunters avoided killing bull caribou because they smelled, and the meat was full of hormones. Male salmon were selected over females because males are larger and fatter. Salmon were also selected based on whether they would make good *ba'*, or dried fish (Simeone and Kari 2002). Smaller bull moose were selected over large bulls who were better breeders. Killing cow moose was avoided when possible.

An important component of Ahtna subsistence was the timing of the harvest. Successful subsistence economies rely on efficient seasonal harvest practices. Hunters and fishers report timing their harvest to periods when animals are abundant and in their prime, ensuring the maximum harvest with a minimal amount of effort in order to produce specific types of foods and raw materials.

Ahtna conservation practices also include appropriate handling of food, sharing of food, and altering of habitats. Rules for handling and preparing the harvest apply to all animals. Knowledge of how to care for animals and plants is passed from generation to generation, such as how to prepare animals so that they do not spoil. Equally important is knowing the proper handling and sharing of food to please the animal spirits and ensure good luck.

Generosity and the sharing of food are critical for ensuring proper social relations within a community, and for ensuring proper relations between human beings and animals. In the past a leader's

Figure 37: Detail of mesh of dipnet made by Grandma McKinley, August 16, 1954. Alaska State Library, Frederica de Laguna Photo Collection, P350-54-11-4.

reputation was based on his generosity. For example, Charley Sanford, who was *kaskae,* or chief, at *Nataełde* (Batzulnetas), was highly esteemed because he "take care of a lot of people, take care of food, give them something to eat all the time" (Joe n.d.). Sharing was also pleasing to the animal spirits and ensured future success.

Ahtna altered the habitat through fire and other means. Fire was a principal method used to enhance habitat. Martha Jackson said, "yes we burn land. New grass come after the fire. Moose he eat. People used to do it [burn] long before [white people came]. In the springtime we burn it. Not big fire. Old time they were stingy for the country. They make just enough fire" (de Laguna and McClellan 1954: Box 5.2, 7.26.54). Katie John (2004) said that her father would burn areas to enhance browse for moose, muskrat, and Dall sheep. And they burned to enhance the growth of blueberries. Fred Ewan told how beaver dams were opened in the fall when there was a chance that fish would be trapped in shallow lakes behind the dam and freeze to death. Fred emphasized that Ahtna managed the situation to make sure that both the beaver and the fish survived. Beaver dams were not opened in the spring – Ahtna instead relied on high water to wash the fish over the dams (Simeone and Kari 2005, 46).

THE AHTNA TRADITION

Humans and animals exist in a reciprocal relationship. They rely on each other for survival. This relationship has been called relational sustainability or relational ecology (Langdon 2003). Relational sustainability is based on the belief that by acting and thinking correctly humans will ensure the continued abundance of the animals and plants they depend on for survival (Langdon 2006, 238)

In the Ahtna tradition, animals are considered non-human persons. Though separate in form, both humans and animals are sentient, aware of themselves and each other. This

understanding on the part of humans is derived from a perpetual being in the world, a constant interaction with animals, and a complete dependence on them for food. Ahtna, like all their Dene relations, have thought deeply about animals and have observed them over many years with intensity, perception, and sensitivity.

In the Ahtna tradition, animals are indeterminate beings: both biological and spiritual, plural and singular, individual and collective.[2] Ahtna elders make no distinction between the natural and supernatural nature of animals. They have a large vocabulary used to distinguish many variations in caribou biology, but what most concerns Ahtna elders is not the individual caribou but the tie between the biological animal and its spiritual aspect. As Ahtna elders Frank and Elsie Stickwan explained:

> All meat – bad luck with it. Just can't get it. If they handle meat right and don't throw it away, the animals know. They [humans who] are lucky with meat. Those who have good luck, handle it right. If they don't handle it right the animals themselves know, get bad luck. The animals know (de Laguna and McClellan 1960, Box 7.5, 8.23.60).

Killing an animal is not an offense. What is offensive and forbidden, or *'engii*, is taking an animal's life for no reason, wasting its flesh, killing it in a disrespectful manner, assuming a disrespectful familiarity, and letting an animal suffer. Any disrespect shown to an animal, either when hunting or processing its body for food, reverberates in the spiritual realm. Offence shown to an individual caribou in death offends all caribou, and once offended all caribou can make themselves scarce with severe consequences for the hunter.

IN THE BEGINNING – THE DISTANT TIME

In the Ahtna tradition, time is cyclical: patterns, events, and relationships are continuously repeated. The souls of both humans and animals are constantly recycled, so there is no notion of movement towards an end. Time is classified into two broad types, loosely termed "mythic time" and the human present. Mythic time, or *Yenida'a Tah,* is of a different order than the time in which we now live. In distant time, there was no distinction between animals and humans. Language was pure and free of distortion so that both humans and animals could speak directly to one another (Krupa 1999). Stories that take place in distant time are "ageographic" or have no geographical referent as compared to stories told about specific people or events (Kari and Tuttle 2018:x). Events that occurred in mythic time are told in oral narratives that Koyukon elder Catharine Attla (1990:ix) called "the Bible of the Athabaskan people."[3] They are to be told in the dark of winter, and it is *'engii* to tell them at any other time of the year. Some stories took days, if not months, to tell. They covered a huge variety of topics but were primarily aimed at instructing young people in proper behavior.

Two epic narrative cycles concern the activities of Raven and the Northern Dene culture hero known as "smart man" or *Cilł Hwyaa* (or *Denehwyaa* in the Mentasta dialect). He is also known as *Yabaaghe Tezyaann,* "the one walking the horizon," or *Netseh Tełyaanen*, "the one who leads us ahead."[4] Raven is the world maker and *Cilł Hwyaa* the transformer. As the creator, Raven is neither perfect nor inscrutable, but imperfect, full of trickery, and a great manipulator. As one man put it, "The Creator made all things good, but Raven introduced confusion" (quoted in Krupa 1999, 128). It was *Cilł Hwyaa* who created the current world order by subduing those "bad" animals that threatened humans, such as Wolf, and the cannibals Wolverine and Rabbit. Before *Cilł Hwyaa* there was little difference between humans and animals. Animals could appear and speak as humans, and they ate human flesh. Humans could turn into animals. *Cilł Hwyaa* separated humans from animals by taking away the animal's power of speech and subduing those that preyed on humans. But *Cilł Hwyaa* did much more, according to Martha and Arthur Jackson: "He made lots of things, like birch bark canoe, he paddled all over the world. Lots of thing he say he do. You know what you call moose hide? He tan moose hide. He clean his [moose] hair and

[2]The idea of an indeterminate nature comes from Henry Sharp (2001), who says this is true of Dënésoliné or Chipewyan. Based on the criteria he outlined, it appears this could likely also apply to the Ahtna.

[3]As Nelson (1983:16) points out, stories from the Distant Time are "first of all an account of origins. They are a Koyukon version of Genesis or perhaps Darwin." They are stories upon which all Northern Dene religious beliefs are based.

[4]This figure, often referred to as the "Traveler," is well known in all Northern Dene cultures.

made canoe too. He clean it, and put stick [hide on frame] and make canoe" (de Laguna and McClellan 1954, Box 5.2, 7.29.54). In essence *Cilł Hwyaa* was the ideal man, combining practical and spiritual knowledge for the good of the people.

In the human present, humans and animals are distinct, but animals still retain aspects of their humanness, so they know and understand the deepest of human intentions. As an old man *Cilł Hwyaa* gained considerable power. When he died, his spirit manifested itself in the sky as the constellation *Nek'eltaeni*, "that which moves over us," described as a large man-animal, sometimes a fox with a human body, holding a walking stick or *tets'* (Cannon et al. 2020, 4). Today *Nek'eltaeni* is considered a powerful being manifested in the Christian God (Kari 1990, 330; Cannon et al. 2020, 21).

Figure 38: Mentasta and Elizabeth Pete, August 13, 1968. Alaska State Library, Frederica de Laguna Photo Collection, P350-68-9-24.

In essence, *Cilł Hwyaa* or *Netseh Tełyaanen* established a new moral order in which humans became distinct beings, but remained a part of nature. They also remained reciprocally obligated to animals not just because animals provided humans with food, but as beings with a common origin and equivalent natures. Bacille George explains:

> All animals were men once […]
>
> Well, I hear long time ago everything a man. Fish too. Before, a long time ago, everything is man and woman all over. Everything – all the animals. After that they turn to all ducks [i.e. animals] and everything. That's what they claim, all the old stories (de Laguna and McClellan 1960, Box 7.5, 8.22.60).

In the distant past, before the smart man, *Netseh Tełyaanen*[5] subdued the animals, Rabbit had a razor sharp tail and tried to kill *Netseh Tełyaanen*, but, as Mentasta and Elizabeth Pete tell the story, *Netseh Tełyaanen* outsmarted Rabbit, broke his tail and made Rabbit into what he is today.

[5]In their fieldnotes, de Laguna and McClellan (1960, Box 7.5, 8.21.60) record the name of smart man as *natuba tEsyan.*

> Rabbit had a tail like a knife. Netseh Tełyaanen he gonna sleep. That rabbit got house. Netseh Tełyaanen going in there. He got nothing to eat and no place to sleep. Rabbit tell "You gonna sleep. […] I make you warm sleep."
>
> Netseh Tełyaanen say "all right" he gonna sleep good nice warm.
>
> He see he coming night time. Netseh Tełyaanen gonna sleep he think heavy. He smart. He know what man do and what animal do.
>
> Rabbit come night time, eleven o'clock. He gonna kill here [in the chest]. His tail sharp. Netseh Tełyaanen put rock here [on his chest]. How he know that? Pretty soon rabbit gonna hit here, pick there. Bent his tail.
>
> Ah ha! He broke his tail. His tail like that now. That's right.
>
> All kinds of animals like man. Talk and look like man – rabbit, bear, wolverine. Man walk always [like] Netseh Tełyaanen (de Laguna and McClellan 1960, Box 7.5, 8.21.60).

While *Netseh Tełyaanen* changed animals into their present form, all animals remained close to humans because they shared a common origin and have the same natures. Animals understand the deepest of human intentions, hear what humans say about them, and are ready to bestow good or bad fortune on humans, depending on how humans treat them. The *'engii* that governs the current relationship between humans and animals is set out in a series of mythic charters. Here are two examples of stories told by Ahtna elders meant to guide human behavior toward animal persons. These stories set out the logic of engagement (Langdon 2006), or rules about how to engage with salmon and other animals. The basic premise is that all living creatures want to be treated the same as a human would treat another human.

The *'engii* between humans and salmon is told in the story of Salmon Boy, or *Bac'its'aadi*, "the one that is highly regarded." Martha Jackson says that *Bac'its'aadi* is a small king salmon. "The fish is not eaten. This fish used to be a man. He would tell the people where to fish." The message is always the same – that humans and salmon are connected in a reciprocal relationship. Martha put it this way: the salmon run well only for those working on them carefully. "Only then do they swim up to someone. If people work on them badly, if they do not work on them nicely, or if a person is lazy towards them, the fish will not run to him. It is because of the people who work on them [the salmon] well, that the salmon still exist now."

> **Yenidan'a nahwgholinic de 'adii.**
> /I will tell you an old time story now.
>
> **Łuk'ae 'adii Bac'its'aadi koniiyi gha nahwgholicde.**
> /I will tell the story of the salmon that is called Bac'its'aadi, 'the one that is highly regarded.'
>
> **Yenidan'a koht'aene tsaa xu natedaasen.**
> /Anciently the salmon man was going back and forth to the cache.
>
> **'Udii naketeł'aas tsaa; tsaa t'aa ba' nadelyaes.**
> /All the time they were sending him to the cache; and brought back dry fish from the cache.

Ba' nadelyaes su.
/He was bringing back dry fish.

Cu taaxu natesdyaayi 'el dae' xuk'edighae' ł', xukol.
/He went there again for the third time, and he disappeared, there was no one.

Kiic'a' tezyaayi 'el tcentsaa t'aa ł'u', k'ay uk'ay' udatcezi yaen' datsatnini'ax.
/They [the people] went away from him, and there the log cache was full of bundles (of dried fish) tied with willows.

Koht'aene łdu' 'eł' kustna' 'ooxe.
/But a man [the salmon boy] had disappeared out there.

Dinac'iighił'taen dae' dinac'iighił'taen dae'.
/Someone had put him inside, thus someone had put him back inside.

Łuk'ae yuzniic.
/Thus the fish had taken him back [into the water].

Nahwdezet łdu' xona ciisi yii xona fish 'eł tkeł'aeni 'el.
/Some time passes, and then they were fishing there with a dipnet.

Ciisi yii naadlaex, Bac'its'aadi ciisi yii naadlaex, yii daaghe' su Bac'its'aadi udetnii de.
/He [the salmon boy] swam back into the dipnet, "the one that is hugely regarded" swam back into the dipnet, and that is why he/it (a small king salmon) is called "the one that is highly regarded."

Dae' łuk'ae'adii ugheldze' ba hghetnaa de yet yaen'.
/Thus now the salmon run well only for those who work on them carefully.

Yet yaen' 'ungget uyehts'e telax
/Only then do they swim to someone.

Yet koht'aene koht' aene ts'akut'edse' ba hghetnaa de' 'ele' ugheldze' ba hegestnah den,
/If the people work on them badly, if they do not work on them nicely,

koht'aene its'e' skudetniiyede 'ele' its'e' tesdiaxe.
/or if a person is lazy toward them, then they [the salmon] will not run to them.

Koht'aene ugheldze' yaatnaade yet yaen' anoxt'e' 'adii łuk'ae' łuk'ae' c'a yii 'adii c'a xu'a koht'aene.
/It is because of the people who work on them well, that the salmon still exist now.

Ugheldze' ba hghetnaade yet yaen' łuk'ae c'ilaen.
/They work on them well, and that is the only reason that the salmon exist.

Kiits'e' skudtniige 'ele' udatahe ugheli ghileh de, yłdu' 'ele' k'adii kestlaxe.
/The ones who are lazy, or whose gear is not good, do not have the fish running to them this time.

Yii gha' su Bac'its'aadi, ts'utsae kekiighiłtaes de utseh co's kii'eł nadghilae tuu yii tanakiighiłtaes.
/That is why anciently when they got "the one that is highly regarded" [in a dipnet] they first would wrap it in down feathers and put it back in the water.

'Ele' ghiziłghaele.
/They did not harvest it.

Dae' xu'eł Bac'its'aadi udi'aan.
/Thus it is called "the one that is highly regarded" (Martha Jackson 1982, translated by Jim Kari).

Kuyxi, or marmots (also called whistlers and sometimes referred to as groundhogs), and *tseles*, or ground squirrels, are snared high in the mountains during the summer. Their meat is eaten and the skins used for clothing. Bacille George tells the story in which the *kuyxi* boss takes pity on a human hunter who is having bad luck. The *kuyxi* gives him permission to take five marmots, but the human gets greedy and takes more. The *kuyxi* boss becomes angry, and the hunter loses everything:

> A hunter walks right into the groundhog hole. The kuyxi ground hog people, they just ask him "where you come from? […] I don't get nothing" [he tells them]. So they give him some. "Don't take all." So he took it all, put it in his pack and take off. Kuyxi boss come back, it's gone [six of his people]. He don't kill them, he just take them. You know, just hard time, act like he is hungry. He took them all. That [kuyxi] chief come back, he look, and they gone. So he call them back. All that kuyxi, all live back, all gone in the mountain. He told to not take that one, you know. They use then for clothes, coat, them things, like tseles. Nice fur that one.
>
> Man was told by ground hog boss to take 5 groundhog and he took six. That's a long, long time. You know before this world. First time world is made. Everything is man. Everything got boss – gives order. [The groundhog boss was sorry for the hunter and gave him permission to take five]. "Don't take it all. Don't kill 'em all. Leave this one." He [the hunter] never get home with them all. He came home without anything. That's really like 'engii. That story. Every different game got story. They get something, some notion. Kuyxi don't like that way treating (de Laguna and Guédon 1968, Box 8.1, 7.10.68).

Martha Jackson told the same story to de Laguna and McClellan. Jackson was more explicit about why the hunter had bad luck, giving two reasons: first he had relations with his own wife, which was *'engii*, and second the man ate whitefish without first cleaning it properly, which was also *'engii*. To restore the hunter's luck, the *kuyxi* chief strikes the man with a stick and out pops the hair of a woman and a fish scale. His luck restored, the human hunter become greedy, takes more than instructed, and loses everything. Jackson concluded by saying "You must nice take care [if you are] going to get anything. It's *'engii* my mother said, that's what my mother say [If proper observances are not taken in hunting ground squirrels.] Right now it's same way. God – that's way. Kids now they don't care nothing (de Laguna and McClellan 1954, Box 5.2, 7.29.54).

RULES FOR HUNTING

To protect against *'engii*, hunters sing special songs, never announce their intention to kill an animal, never boast about killing animals, and, to avoid an unseemly familiarity with the animal, never use its true name, but refer to it indirectly.

Figure 39: Tenas Charley wearing dentalia and button and beaded coat, standing near cache and edge of cabin, Copper Center, August 28, 1960. Frederica de Laguna Photo Collection, P350-60-6-6.

In the Ahtna tradition, the *yiige*', or spirit of an animal, exists externally or separately from the body and remains active for three or four days after the animal dies. The *yiige*' can therefore observe what is happening to its own body, sitting off to the side and watching as the hunter butchers the animal. The *yiige*' functions as protector. As a protector, the animal's *yiige*' is vengeful and willing to wreak havoc on those who irreverently dispose of the bones or carcasses of animals. The *yiige*' also punishes those who kill animals for no reason, waste any part of an animal, make fun of an animal, or steal animals out of another person's traps.

Tenas Charley explained that when he killed an animal, such as fox, it was only the external form of the animal that died. The spirit remained and watched how the body was treated. Charley explained that the fox took off his clothes to stuff them full of brush to look like a man, so the fox was not really dead. Its "self" remains alive and knows how the human treats its body, its "clothes."

> You see, me kill anything. Fox, all same put his clothes in the snare – that's the same thing. Himself, he listen, he see, when I kill the fox, he mad. That's why I take care nice, everything [bones] burn. I kill that fox all right. He self, he stay over there [Tenas pointed to the brush outside the cabin]. His coat and dress, I get it. His self over there, you know. That's the way – me [do] bad, he know. He get mad. No treat right, no more kill. Fox took his skin off and made false body to be caught in the snare. His real self just watched. That's why the real fox never die (de Laguna and McClellan 1958, Box 6.1, 8.26.58).

Clubbing an animal to death, in most cases, was *'engii*, as was saying its true name. Tony Jackson said "They call *'engii*. We never club it. We can club bear if get the chance, but not small animal. When you club little animal, they say you don't get any more" (de Laguna and McClellan 1960, Box 7.5, 8.25.60).

Andy Brown said people should not show undue familiarity with an animal, such as a lynx, by using its name. He also made the point that a trapper should stay on the trapline until the season was over. Leaving the trapline would show disrespect for the animals.

> When we trapping, we can't call his [lynx] name. He don't like hear his name. If we trapping already and season not over and we got potlatch and then [go] back on trap line, no more kill, no more get. Bad luck. We gotta stay with trap line till the seasons over, not walk around the village, not stay in the village. That's truth too! (de Laguna and McClellan 1960, Box 7.5, 8.20.60).

There were prohibitions on who could butcher meat, how it was brought into the house, and what was to be done with it.

> Man cut meat, men and women could cook. Moose, leave it outdoors. Just man, that's all he cut it. Man, he cut it moose and he feed it all old people. He feeding all old people, young kid. All give it way. Little meat, little meat, little meat. You kill moose you feed a lot of people. Everybody get meat.
>
> Way long time, some place bring in like window [meat was brought in through the window, not over the door step]. 'Engii that's what it mean. 'Engii, no more kill. Why? Bad luck. No more moose he kill. Moose run away (de Laguna and Guédon 1968, Box 8.1, 7.15.68).

To avenge any transgression, the animal's *yiige'* could inflict incurable disease, which Ahtna call *c'uniis*, literally "it takes something." Bell and Maggie Joe described the effects of *c'uniis*:

> 'Engii, any kind of fresh meat in the house is a danger to a baby, it will scare the baby, give them cramps, the way to prevent that is to put charcoal on their face. *C'uniis*, spirit sickness. Sometimes kid faint from that game. Die, sometimes they die. [Maggie said this only occurred when a child is breast fed, using a bottle does not have the same effect][6] (de Laguna and McClellan 1960, Box 7.2, 8.6.60).

Arthur and Martha Jackson explained that to protect children, hunters had to wait three or four days to bring a dead animal into the house.

> Moose too got *c'uniis* – all kinds of animals, bear, black bear, wolverine, rabbit too, ya dog. Babies cannot see [look at] a dead dog. Fish do not have *c'uniis*.
>
> Ya, that's no good for baby. You see, lynx, where baby stay you can't bring in. Three or four days later bring in. Baby might dream his [lynx] face. He can't sleep. Pretty soon lynx go in his face and baby cry. *C'uniis*, – pretty soon sleep doctor come and find out [what's the matter]. Even when a baby is in the womb has to be protected from *c'uniis* (de Laguna and McClellan 1960, Box 7.4, 8.11.60).

[6]Because bottle-feeding was a recent introduction among the Ahtna, it was understood as something outside of the traditional relationship between humans and animals, and to which *'engii* proscriptions did not apply in the same way.

Salmon fishing was also governed by *'engii*, and there had to be a ceremony for the first salmon caught.

> If the first fish are coming they might bring sickness. So when the first fish come, they [the fishers] clean up. All the children take baths and use grass for feed and mix it with the fish.
>
> And they take some small little short feathers and tie them on each kid's head. Everyone in the village and its [*sic*] like a stamp on the kids, so that if anything happens then be sure and remember. All the women and kids, not the men. It's like a sign so the fish wouldn't make them sick.
>
> Everyone eats the fish, mix it with greens and grass.
>
> They [*sic*] save the bones of the fish. They put it in the cache. And it will be there many years. They keep them piled up. That's just for the first fish. And for the other fish it don't make no difference [what you do with the bones]. But all the first fish, you just save it like a souvenir (de Laguna and McClellan 1954, Box 5.1, 7.8.54).

The first fish had to die in the fish wheel, they could not club them. After a certain date, clubbing the fish was no longer *'engii*.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In the western tradition, nature is a fixed reality, the backdrop for the intentionality of human actions. In the Ahtna tradition, humans and nature are inseparable. All things are animate or have agency and possess a spirit. While now distinct, human beings remain a part of nature and are reciprocally obligated to animals, not just because animals provide humans with food, but as beings with a common origin and equivalent natures.

Indigenous ontologies attributing life (soul or spirit and emotion) to non-human persons, known as animism, was an early focus of anthropology (Tyler 1871). In the evolutionary thinking prevalent at that time, animism was considered an early stage of religious thought based on erroneous or mistaken ideas about the relationship of human beings to the natural world. Yet during the course of the twentieth century, the theory that Indigenous cultures are at the bottom of the evolutionary ladder has been discredited as ethnocentric and simplistic. More recently, even the idea that nature is a single reality has been called into question, as discussed above. Nevertheless, the question of how to regard Indigenous people's beliefs continues to be one that is actively debated in cultural anthropology. More broadly, this debate speaks to questions about how western scientists and resource managers should relate to Indigenous ontologies.

The issue of how to incorporate Indigenous knowledge or traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) into a western science-based resource management and environmental assessment has produced two broad patterns of thought. One side argues that local observations about species abundance, seasonal movements, and environmental conditions are useful data to collect and then fit into a scientific paradigm. Another says the value of Indigenous knowledge is much broader. Instead of providing a cultural perspective on a single nature, TEK provides an alternative view of the universe that hinges on the relationship between humans and their environment (Nadasdy 2007).

The question is, are we to take Ahtna elders seriously? Are they literally describing an alternate reality as Richard Nelson said? Or are their beliefs and understanding simply "child-like" with no basis in fact? Or, are we to understand their beliefs as a cultural metaphor for our own assumptions that, if we are to have salmon, we must, of course, take care of nature by maintaining habitat and controlling harvests? But is nature a fixed reality and knowable only through objective reason? Can we assume we

know everything about animals? Scientists such as Donald Griffin (1976) and Carl Safina (2015) question the prevailing assumption in western science that animals are capable only of programmed and mechanical responses.

Some Ahtna "conservation practices," such as the system of territories – which could be compared to game management units – management by clan leaders, predator control, self-limiting harvests, timing harvests, and altering the habitat resonate with scientific management principles. But other practices, those associated with *'engii,* seem quaint and irrational from this perspective. But Ahtna elders are saying much more. Like all their Dene relations, Ahtna elders have thought long and deeply about animals, observing them with intensity, perception, and sensitivity. As Dene elder Bessie John of Scottie Creek said:

> Everything is connected. But you can't always see it. Sometimes you walk right it into it without knowing and you break it apart. You got to look ahead of you, look to see what's coming. You got to pick your trail to keep things together (quoted in Easton 2008, 24).

Figure 40: Winter view of an Ahtna woman and two children posed outside a tent. Geoffrey Bleakley Collection, Makawao, Hawaii, 2005144.

CHAPTER 6: TIITL' (POTLATCH)

INTRODUCTION

The potlatch is the center of Ahtna ceremonial life – an anchor to the past and a reflection of traditional values. The word potlatch, though widely used today, is derived from Chinook jargon, a Native American trade vocabulary brought to Alaska by prospectors at the end of the nineteenth century. In the Ahtna language a potlatch is *tiitl'* or *hwtiitl'*, and applies to various formal occasions when one group hosts another, distributing gifts to the guests to mark important social events.

The potlatch is an old institution, and like any institution, it has changed. In the past, only wealthy *denae* or *kaskae* gave potlatches, but as the economy changed, more people could afford to hold potlatches. Once potlatches lasted for days; today they occur over a weekend. Formerly, gifts included tanned skins, handmade clothing, furs, and beadwork. Today, people still distribute beadwork and clothing, but they also give away blankets, guns, household items, and cash. Feasts today include "white man food" but also traditional foods such as moose-head soup, beaver, muskrat, salmon, and whitefish. In the past, young women and children were not allowed to attend potlatches for fear they would contaminate the ceremony; today, everyone is allowed to attend. As in the past, dancing and singing are essential parts of the ceremony, but since the mid-twentieth century, speeches have been made in English, originally to make the ceremony more transparent to the missionaries.

Missionaries in the Copper Basin have affected the potlatch. Believing they were demonic, missionaries disparaged the potlatch as a "Native Dance." Ahtna who took part in potlatches were not permitted to participate in the gospel teams or speak at the annual Native Bible Convention. But by the 1970s, Native leadership began to "take charge of the ceremony and dances and re-establish Indian identification with the good and healthy, eliminating that which had been evil" (Crandall 1983).

Despite these changes, the essential nature of the potlatch remains unchanged; it still is about reciprocity between clans. Clans aid each other during life crises – particularly the death of a loved one – and the exchange of gifts and food is an aspect of the ceremony that strengthens the relationship between clans.

OCCASIONS FOR A POTLATCH

There are different reasons for holding a potlatch, sometimes referred to as a "party." Gifts are distributed to celebrate a significant event in a person's life, such as an adoption or a child's first hunting success, or to heal an injury or insult including an offense as grievous as murder. Ahtna elder Mentasta Pete recalled what happened when he killed his first moose.

> Interviewer: Did you have a party [potlatch] when you killed your first moose?
>
> Pete: Yeh, good time when I kill moose.
>
> My brother, and mother and daddy gave the party, that's the way give party.
>
> Gave the party to other nation [clan]. We give to 'nother tribe [clan]. Daddy and mama gonna potlatch. Tsisyu, nitsisyu [names clans]. Bout 2-3-4 people at party.
>
> Gave to sister-in-law and to my sister's husband, too.
>
> I didn't eat any of the moose I killed, not when I killed first one.
>
> My brother, he cut him [moose] up.
>
> Gave a party for every type of animal he killed (de Laguna and McClellan 1960, Box 7.4, 7.10.60).

In the old times, disputes or offenses – even as grievous as murder – could be settled by a distribution of gifts if all parties agreed. It was important to try to settle disputes through negotiation and gifts in order to avoid hard feelings and the possibility of revenge killings. Frank and Elsie Stickwan give an example of what could happen in the case of an accidental death:

> Them old people had a meeting together. If they don't do that, they won't be really friends together. They be bad friends today right now.
>
> The senior clan leader does all kinds of talking to dead person's relatives. He puts up stuff and blankets and gun. Other relatives put up gun, money, and lots of blankets. The relations of the deceased get gifts (on one occasion the mother of deceased got so many blankets she gave them to her other relatives). People who bury the deceased receive a rifle as a payment.
>
> Then they have big talk, trouble down, everything settle down. No more talk after that.
>
> They don't make a [memorial] song for an accident (de Laguna and McClellan 1960, Box 7.5, 8.23.60).

The most compelling reason for holding a potlatch is the death of an individual. Today when a person dies, relatives of the deceased hold a potlatch immediately after the funeral. They may also hold a memorial potlatch some years later. This marks the final stage in mourning.

The death of a person creates uncertainty, danger, and sorrow. There is particular uncertainty if the deceased is a community leader. Danger exists in the fear that the deceased's ghost or spirit might attempt to take the spirit of another person, especially a close relative. To avoid this, members of the opposite moiety, preferably brothers-in-law or sisters-in-law, prepare the corpse and dig the grave. In the past, those who handled the corpse stayed home for ten days to purify themselves; they also took a sweat bath and put on new clothes provided by relatives of the deceased. For thirty days a relative threw bits of food into a fire to feed the deceased person's spirit.

A person's death also brings sorrow. Ahtna elder Glenda Ewan explained that the grieving relatives must let the "feeling come out of you." If you don't do the right thing by your loved ones, she said "something bother you all the time."

> A lot of people don't do it all the time, but most of the village thinks when our loved one is gone we have to make what we call a potlatch. By bringing friends together, that makes the feelings come out of you. Otherwise you will always have those feelings; that's the religious, the Indian way. If you don't potlatch on your loved one then something will bother you all the time. So when they do that, pay those who take care of the grave, who worked for loved ones, they give them gifts, give them food and things like that, they don't feel bad anymore. They're happy. Their loved ones gone that's the way they feel. That's why the potlatch, it really means to potlatch over our loved ones (Neeley and Ewan 1987).

Holding a memorial potlatch is a cleansing experience. One man from Mentasta put it this way:

> When some man lost their daughter or son they feel it all their life. If they don't do anything for the grave it's just like they're lost. They can't get back their strength. If they put up a potlatch then they come up and have power just like before. [So] they feel like before again. If they don't give away, it will bother them all of the time. That's why the potlatch (quoted in Strong 1972, 31).

Figure 41: Douglas Billum with a smear of potlatch paint on his forehead, Tazlina; September 9, 1958. Alaska State Library, Frederica de Laguna Photo Collection, P350-58-6-36.

On another level a potlatch is a formal and public payment of the mourner's debt to those people who attended the corpse, dug the grave and participated in the potlatch. An individual's social status is based on how generous they are in repaying their debts. Bacille George made that clear when he said:

> [...] somebody bury your relation you got to pay.
>
> If he don't pay me he has to potlatch me some time. I don't work for nothing. His other relations help him to give a potlatch. Just like get good record that way. Really law, old time. If he don't pay, he's no man, don't own nothing, no good, stingy (de Laguna and McClellan 1960, Box 7.5, 8.22.60).

According to Wilson Justin, memorial potlatches are significant for several reasons.

> Memorial potlatches are related to funeral potlatches, but most memorial potlatches are a number of things. First of all you can settle issues. Political speakers like myself can bring issues up and ask that factions settle it at the potlatch. No place else can you do that. Clan rivalries have to cease. When you come to a potlatch, there's a boundary outside the potlatch area, that when you pass that boundary, you have to leave your fears, prejudice, hates, and everything behind. I mean its [*sic*] GONE. And you are basically different. You're a new person. So if you're asked to settle a rivalry or what-have-you, you have to

> comply--or leave. And any thought or act of leaving a potlatch is so mindboggling that I can't conceive of it. So you stay and you settle (quoted in Ainsworth 1999, 36).

The size of a potlatch often depends on the age and social status of the individual for whom the potlatch is given and the wealth of the hosts. A potlatch given by a socially prominent and wealthy family can include guests from all of the Ahtna communities as well as people from as far away as villages on the upper Tanana River, and Anchorage and Fairbanks.

Funeral and memorial potlatches are passionate events in which grief is expelled and transformed into joy. In the beginning the mourners are allowed to express their grief by crying, dancing, and singing songs composed especially to eulogize the dead. Once a certain amount of time has passed, the mourners are drawn back from the abyss of desolation by joyous dancing and singing that emphasizes life over death. Finally, the hosts expel their grief by distributing gifts that are invested with their sorrow. Through this last act the mourners symbolically dissolve the corpse and let go of the deceased, ending the period of public mourning.

As they release their grief, the hosts gain enormous prestige for their lavish hospitality, fulfilling their obligations, and demonstrating respect for members of the opposite moiety who are their father's relatives. As Bacille and Nancy George put it:

> Potlatch – Have big time, big dance. Then we give it all away. We got nothing. We broke. You go home. Then you got good name, big name – "rich woman." Everybody who gives a potlatch is rich. Like put in the bank, just for name is why we potlatch. Who don't potlatch got no name. If you have a million dollars you are not rich if you don't potlatch. You don't count, don't mean nothing to nobody. If he do potlatch, that's a big man, big man coming.
>
> Yes women too. Same way – "rich woman." They got like records [for giving potlatches] – big name just for the name, big name. Big shot (de Laguna and McClellan 1958, Box 6.1, 8.28.58).

Today, potlatches are planned well in advance so that the hosts have time to assemble the necessary gifts and food. The exception is a funeral potlatch, which is held immediately after the burial service. Once the funeral is over, the deceased's relatives prepare for a memorial potlatch, which can take several years.

Funerary and memorial potlatches will be the primary focus of this chapter, as they are by far the most common kind of potlatch observed today.

HOSTS AND GUESTS

In any potlatch the hosts (those giving the potlatch) are always of the opposite clan from the guests. As described in Chapter 4, Ahtna society is divided into two moieties (halves) and under each moiety are five or six clans. When someone dies, members of their opposite clan – a group called *tlaen* in Ahtna – prepare the corpse, dig the grave, and provide comfort to the grieving relatives of the deceased. Members of the deceased person's same clan, or their mother's people (since clan membership is inherited from one's mother), actually host the potlatch. On the other hand, guests at a potlatch are often members of the hosts' father's clan. By giving a potlatch and lavishing gifts on the guests, the hosts are honoring their father's people.

Chistochina elders Adam and Katie Sanford described how *tlaen* care for the corpse and dig the grave, and how they are compensated.

> Adam: Ya, best to get tlaen [cross cousin or members of the opposite moiety] to bury the body. He get big potlatch, gun, clothes and [receive] more big potlatch [those who] work for body. Some men get over $100.

Interviewer: Who works on the [grave] fence?

Adam: Tlaen – he work for you. See, if I die, get some cousin, relation, and potlatch. All tlaen make coffin. Not your relation. You die, I work you, work your body. All relation work you.

Interviewer: Who would get the guns?

Kate: Who working on the graveyard and work on the body.

Adam: You see four or five men work on the grave, dig 'em out; and make coffin and box top and box and make fence. Each fellow get gun, who not relation, he give to. Not to own relation, just other guy (de Laguna and McClellan 1960, Box 7.4, 8.15.60).

POTLATCH ETIQUETTE

To hold a potlatch is a formal affair that requires specific etiquette. For example, it is proper etiquette that invitations be extended to high-ranking persons or clan leaders in the opposite moiety. Automobiles, telephones, and social media have made it easier to extend invitations. But for many elders the old formalities are important, and many feel they should still be observed.

In the past, etiquette required the guests be received formally. In the winter, the guests stopped outside the village and put on their best clothes – beaded coats, moccasins, and mittens – and then proceeded into the village dancing and singing and firing guns into the air. To receive their guests, the hosts lined up outside the hall. The men fired rifles as sign of welcome, and the women sang songs. Clan leaders, who were sometimes *denae* or *kaskae*, traded speeches, trying to outdo one another. Mentasta Pete described the reception of guests:

> When they get to the place you hear shooting. Everybody go out, and start to sing that worry song, standing in line in front of the house. Singing the worry song that chief make. The guests dance and sing to their music, a happy song of their own. Both hosts and guests sing their own song at the same time. If the guests come late – say a day late, the hosts meet them outside and sing their worry song and hold them outside in the cold for an hour. If the guests are on time they only sing for 10 minutes before letting them inside (de Laguna and McClellan 1954, Box 5.4, 8.11.54).

Virginia Pete (2001) remembered when she was a little girl in 1938 and the Chitina people arrived for a potlatch across the Copper River from Copper Center.

> I remember we cross the river, [at] Chief Andrew [house]. I don't know why they call him chief. He had a big house across the river. Had big potlatch over his wife – that was in 1938. All people all come, all gather together. Not much food, he was a stingy man I guess. People used to come up to my mom and dad. They come and eat. Grandma cook for them.
>
> You see big dance from Copper down to Chitina. People come up. You see dance, boy it's a big dance. First time I seen Chitina people was coming they say, that's Walya Hobson's dad, Douglas Billum. He was a big guy, him and his wife. First time I see him they put canvas where trail is they put canvas across.

> My dad tell me look what going to happen. I was kind of scared they were shooting guns. Whoever was there at Big Jack's house they had guns too. After they get done they were coming and they shoot them guns. [My dad] Tell me "don't get scared that's the way they meet each other. We gonna start shooting too. They say those people are coming from Chitina now. They heard them shooting. Let's get outside and let's do ours too." They shoot answer each other I guess.
>
> They put across canvas. That snow was pretty deep. Douglas Billum, first time I see him dance, boy he really dance. He come off that canvas he just come underneath and the rest the people come out. They were singing and dancing. They were singing, singing, and dancing.
>
> They all met each other at the house. They all go around, dance and sing, and one man in the middle dance. Everyone go around and dance. I seen it that way. That's from Chitina. They come join each other later on big dance every night at that place. You can hear from here to the highway people singing. I sing loud.

Today guests are received less formally. Hosts and guests no longer line up to receive each other, and clan leaders no longer give competitive speeches.

As in the past, it is now customary for the hosts to give a welcoming speech and the guests to answer. Martha Jackson described how, at a potlatch in the 1950s, guests from Northway arrived, and both the hosts and guests made speeches. Speeches were given in both the Native language and English:

> [Walter] Northway talks. Tenas [Charley] answers for us.
>
> Oscar Ewan talks a little, Pete Stickwan sometime talk white man, young fellows can't talk Indian. He says:
>
> "I am glad you people come. I come get you, I thought you didn't come. I sure thank you come. I hope you get good trip home."
>
> Pete Stickwan he go around and invites, because he got car (de Laguna and McClellan 1960, Box 7.4, 8.11.60).

Historically clan rivalries could create tensions between hosts and guests. To avoid conflict required considerable social skills and knowledge of clan histories and relationships. Disruptions occurred if either the hosts or guests criticized the other's lack of etiquette. For example, a high-status guest might criticize the hosts for sending the wrong person when giving out invitations. If the hosts inadvertently insulted the guests, they could turn around and go home. The hosts then have to get the guests to come back. If the guests angered their hosts, the hosts could retaliate by keeping their guests waiting outside in the cold. Or they could make them eat grease or tea spiked with tobacco. According to Jerry Charley:

> […] if you had [done] something wrong, they'll – they make tea. They put tobacco in there – and this is true! – they put grease in there. Mix it all up. And all you tribe people, they put white blanket in the middle of the floor for you. You gotta drink that grease. All that black tea and tobacco. Yeah, they had to drink it. Oh, yeah! Uh huh! Yeah, you sick for a month! They just weigh about, about 10 pounds of tea in that tea pot, and then they put that black ball of tobacco in that. Mix it. You imagine drinking that! And then sometime they gave you grease. Drink all that grease! Oh, he talk some wrong way, you know (quoted in Ainsworth 1999, 37).

ORATORY

Speeches are an important part of the potlatch. One purpose of a speech is to set the tone of the event as hosts and guests praise and thank one another. At all potlatches, clan leaders are obliged to give speeches. A ranking man from the guest's side gives a condolence speech expressing sympathy for the loss of the deceased. The hosts reciprocate by thanking the guests for coming to the potlatch and helping them in their time of need. Sometimes there is a sermon or lecture delivered by an elder to the young urging them to follow the "Indian way." Today all speeches are made in English since most young people do not understand the Ahtna language.

In the past, high-ranking men offered their condolences to the hosts using a stylized oratory called "chief's talk" or *hwtiitł kołdogh*. Only a few, well-trained individuals could make such speeches, which were given in what sounded like a scolding or angry manner using esoteric language that reflected the speaker's knowledge. Martha Jackson heard this kind of chief's talk when she was young:

> Interviewer: Did you see people talk that way?
>
> Martha: Me scare. I was a little girl. Somebody high talking, I though they start a fight. All right, [Walter] Northway old man come, good talk. All right if something wrong in that talk and Tenas Charley he to answer and he make straight everything that talk. Nice, no mean then, all right (de Laguna and McClellan 1960, Box 7.3, 7.28.60).

These speeches were supposed to educate the potlatch participants about the clan linage of the deceased. Such speeches often referred to important pieces of local geography such a prominent hill, mountain, or riverbank connected to each major village. Andy Brown said:

> […] [w]here the village, where chief sit down, where chief die, the hill is like his face. The mountain is just like a chief. Mt. Drum is Copper Center grandpa and Mt. Blackburn is Chitina grandpa.
>
> You know, if you living here for many years, you got grandpa here. Them Chitina people talk about Mt. Blackburn like Grandpa's face. Mentasta, they talk about Mountain too, where there is a big lake. I hear. They talk about the old days too, all that mountain, and then they [the speaker] win the case that way. They talk all day (de Laguna and McClellan 1960, Box 7.3, 8.30.60).

In the past there was competition between chiefs, and they often talked in riddles to trick the other chief. Well-educated chiefs knew enough to figure out the answer. Andy Brown said that chiefs talked to one another and had to be able to answer each other correctly. If they answered incorrectly the hosts could leave the guests standing outside in bad weather:

> He answer all right, but he answer wrong. If he right way answering, everybody clap. Good no more trouble. All shake hands. Take inside the house and go eats. If no right answer, got to stay outside, even cold weather. All day maybe bad weather (de Laguna and McClellan 1960, Box 7.3, 8.31.60).

If the invited chief cannot answer or answers in a way that insults the hosts, there can be trouble. But if the guest answers the question or talks well:

> Then that chief feels very good and say thank you, shake hands says thank you, tsin'aen. And maybe he might give you $20 for talking and he let you inside and makes people happy (because) they talk each other right.
>
> Shake hands. And bring in all the men.
>
> You boss now!
>
> Everybody happy. If you mix it up, if you don't talk right, everybody worry. No happy. And use gun too. If you [the stranger] don't [know] the answer (de Laguna and McClellan 1960, Box 7.3, 8.31.60).

By the 1960s, the classic way of making speeches went out of style. Today most speeches are in English and have no competitive edge. In general, they do not contain educational content. Martha Jackson commented that no one [Ahtna] would make a speech at a potlatch and only a few elders from "up the line" in Northway knew how to talk that way.

> Martha: No speech. Nobody talk. They quit that thing. Somebody, just old time, up-the-line. Big people talk, Tenas Charlie when up-the-line old man come, then Tenas Charlie talk. Hi yu (high) talk old time. All old people talk, old man come, then he talk. Sometime Arthur [Jackson] talk.
>
> Arthur Jackson: No old man, no talk, Old man from up-the-line, Northway, Tetlin, he coming, he talk.
>
> Martha: She make good party, you know, Northway. Everybody coming, good party, good, big talk, no trouble (de Laguna and McClellan 1960, Box 7.3, 7.28.60).

FEASTING

Feasting is another important part of the potlatch. In the past, potlatches lasted as long as the food held out. Today the hosts prepare to feed their guests for about three days. Guests also bring their own containers, and they are given food to bring home with them. It was tradition for guests who belong to the same clan to sit together, but today guests from the same village tend to sit with one another. When people come into the hall or potlatch house, they sit all around the edge of the hall. There used to be considerable protocol attached to seating. A *denae* or *kaskae* would become angry if he was not seated correctly, and he would then criticize the hosts, who would then have to give another potlatch to straighten things out.

> When they go back, talk. [They would say] don't feed us nice. When we come back home, we talk back "they don't treat us nice." That's why we treat nice. They have to give another potlatch for that man. Then another potlatch [the insulted man gives one in return] (de Laguna and McClellan 1954, Box 5.4, 8.11.54).

Formerly all of the food served at a potlatch came from the land. For example, at a potlatch put on by Charlie Sanford in the winter of 1930, most of the food served was boiled sheep meat. Today every kind of traditional food ranging from salmon to caribou, moose, porcupine, and beaver is served, along with an assortment of store-bought foods including spaghetti, which people joke is the new traditional food. Certainly, the most important food served at modern potlatches is moose meat with moose-head soup being the centerpiece of any event. Both the State of Alaska and the Federal government recognize the ceremonial importance of moose and allow Alaska Natives to kill moose out of season for a potlatch.

Like most things in a potlatch, feasting is surrounded by *'engii,* and there are rules for who should serve the food and who should eat. For example, only young men should serve food, a rule still observed today. It is *'engii* for young women to serve food to men. In the past, the hosts did not eat, and men always ate before women. In this exchange, Martha and Arthur Jackson explained that traditionally only the guests ate, but today everyone eats together. In the past, hosts and guests eating together was considered *'engii,* and could lead to considerable misfortune, including a person's death:

> Interviewer: Do the hosts eat with the guests? Will everybody eat?
>
> Martha: Who potlatch, who come calling, old timey, they are the only ones who eat. But now it's a new style, we all eat together. Old time, we can't eat at Pete Stickwan's party, they say "engii" they said. But no more.
>
> Interviewer: Why engii?
>
> Martha: Engii, all die. Engii, your party, you eat, you die they say. That's why everybody die right now this time, I guess. That's why all die now! (de Laguna and McClellan 1960, Box 7.3, 7.28.60).

The Jacksons also told how in the old days, when the guests had emptied a serving dish or pan, they threw the pan into the center of the hall with a shout, something people do not do today. The idea was to make as much noise as possible. The noise of the empty pan meant that all the guests had their received their due. Here the Jacksons describe how, in the past, the guests were given a pan of meat, and when it was empty, they yelled "*Hu wa*!"

> Martha: Hu wa he say when pan its all empty. Pretty soon all gone, Hu Wa! Make feel good. Just make good time.
>
> Interviewer: Do they put more food in that pan?
>
> Martha: No, can't put more in! Do this [yell] every time they eat. This time can't do no more – just pass around. You see, somebody potlatch me – meat all full. All right, all my relation all take the hand. Everybody get it, everybody get it! Pretty soon all gone "All gone!" I say.
>
> Guests used to do every time they ate.
>
> Now this time he can't do it. Just he pass around.
>
> Different style now.
>
> Everybody help our relation. Everybody ready all yell together, big noise. That pan too, big noise (de Laguna and McClellan 1960, Box 7.3, 7.28.60).

At the end of the potlatch all the leftover food is given away to the guests, who take it home.

SONG AND DANCE

In exchange for food and gifts, the guests are expected to sing for the hosts, both as a form of entertainment and as a way to support the grieving process. All new songs made for the potlatch are carefully rehearsed. A tambourine-style drum called *lgheli*, made of moose or caribou skin stretched over a birch frame, is used to accompany songs and dances at a potlatch.

Songs performed during a potlatch fall into three categories: 1) sorry or mourning songs, 2) dance songs, and 3) the potlatch song. If the potlatch is a celebration, the mourning songs are omitted.

At a funeral potlatch, the mourning process begins with a sorry song made expressly for the deceased. These songs, called *hwtiitl' c'eliis,* are made to eulogize the dead. They are sung to a slowly beaten drum and composed of short phrases that express the hosts' grief. Sorry songs vary in intensity, depending on the circumstances of the death and the feelings of the composer. Because grief is a particularly powerful emotion, it has to be physically expelled from a person's mind and body before it becomes unhealthy. It is the responsibility of the guests to lift the hosts out of their grief, as Bacille George explained: "That way somebody [a relative] die, he go crazy [with grief] – only way to feel better is to dance. The man dances with his cross cousin [a man] who "every time he falls down he lift him up?" (de Laguna and McClellan 1960, Box 7.5, 8.22.60). In the past, mourners could dance for days on end. Today dancing can go on for hours, but not days.

Figure 42 : Bill Joe, dressed in dance costume and holding a *ganhoo* or dance staff, as used at potlatches and ceremonies. Chistochina, August 29, 1968. Alaska State Library, Frederica de Laguna Photo Collection, P350-68-10-18.

To start the mourning process, only the hosts and their relatives sing. The guests then join in, singing a succession of sorry songs from previous potlatches. By singing different sorry songs, the guests are reminded of their loss and are able empathize with the grief of the hosts, as Elizabeth Pete explained:

> They sing worry song everyday. People that gives the potlatch sing worry song at 9 or 10 o'clock in the morning. Sometimes at noon, they sing it too.
>
> Eventually the guests learn the song and they sing along too. They can sing a new song made for the potlatch and old songs. After that they sing happy song and dance every day (de Laguna and McClellan 1954, Box 5.4, 8.11.54).

Dance songs, *c'edzes c'eliis*, are joyous expressions of life in which hosts and guests sing and dance together. Dancers sometimes imitate different activities: caribou pawing the ground, a person paddling a canoe, pointing guns, or pointing at flying swans, according to Robert John, Sr. (de Laguna and McClellan 1960, Box 7.3, 7.23.60). Dance songs are joyful, loud, and playful.

The potlatch or wealth song, *'unggadi 'dliis*, has always been sung before the distribution of gifts. During the song the dancers sway from side to side, arms folded, singing for good luck. Each potlatch song is composed for a special occasion and is sung once at the potlatch. It then becomes the property of the hosts' clan and may not be sung by another clan unless they pay for it. It is *'engii* to sing a potlatch song outside the potlatch because it is just for the hosts' luck. If the singers do not sing the song correctly, and "miss a little bit, then be bad luck for the rest of my life" (de Laguna and McClellan 1960, Box 7.3, 7.23.60).

THE GIFTS

Potlatches are supposed to be lavish displays of wealth and generosity. In the past, the hosts were expected to give almost all their possessions away to cleanse their grief. Nowadays, the hosts are still expected to shower the guests with an abundance of food and gifts, but they no longer give everything away.

In the past, potlatch gifts, or *ghalli*, consisted of tanned skins, furs, clothing, and food. Later, after they became involved in the fur trade, Ahtna began to give away wool blankets and rifles. Today these items, along with beadwork and wild meat and fish, are considered to be traditional. Certain guests today, such as those involved in digging the grave or building the grave fence, are sometimes given special gifts, such as suits of clothes. In recent years, as they have become more affluent, people have also begun to give away household appliances, but these are considered less important than the rifles and blankets. Small amounts of cash are also given away to offset the expenses of specially invited guests.

Figure 43: Receiving line, potlatch at Wood Camp, 1930s. Men are lined up with rifles ready to fire in greeting, blankets are displayed to the left. The men with feathers are waiting to greet guests who will come down the trail. Alaska and Polar Regions Department, Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

At a large potlatch, hundreds of blankets are given away. The most coveted are white striped "point blankets" first made by the Hudson's Bay Company but now purchased from Pendleton Woolen Mills. They are expensive and are only given out to very special guests. Jim McKinley remembered that the first time he saw Hudson's Bay white blankets was at a Mentasta potlatch in 1927 for Mentasta Sam, the older brother of Mentasta Pete:

> The blankets were hung up outside, 20 of them. The hosts received an advance warning when their guests are expected so that had time to hang the blankets up. This word would be brought when the guests were a certain distance away (de Laguna and McClellan 1960, Box 7.3, 7.30.60).

Today the .30-30 Winchester lever-action rifle is considered the most appropriate rifle to give away at a potlatch. These guns were introduced in the late nineteenth century and have now become associated with the traditional hunting life.

Tradition dictates that during the last night of the potlatch the gifts are to be brought to the hall and passed through a window, since the thresholds of doors are considered unclean because young women have passed through them. Although this precaution may seem anachronistic, since y0oung women are now allowed to attend potlatches, the tradition emphasizes the spiritual nature of the potlatch. Once in the hall, all of the gifts are stacked on a cloth or piece of plastic, so they do not touch the floor. This is so the gifts are not contaminated.

Even today, women are not supposed to be out on the floor when the gifts are laid out. Passing out the gifts is a boy or man's job. The hosts can choose a son or grandson for the task, and the elder can tell them who should receive a gift.

The gifts are distributed in a particular sequence based on the service the guests rendered to the hosts and their relationship to the deceased. Those young men of the opposite clan who dug the grave, made the coffin, and built the grave fence receive their gifts first, usually blankets, rifles, and some cash to defray the expense of attending the potlatch. Next, gifts are given to the elders of opposite clans: they too receive guns, blankets and money. In the case of unexpected tragedy, such as the death of an only son, the hosts' family can give gifts to the family in mourning to acknowledge their loss.

Figure 44: Jim McKinley holding a blanket at a potlatch for Kate Sanford. Harry Johns can be seen sitting in the background. Chistochina, 1987. Photo courtesy of Bill Simeone.

THE 'ENGII OF POTLATCH

The potlatch is full of '*engii* and the possibility of misfortune; during and after the event, hosts and guests are vulnerable to spiritual forces that could bring bad luck or evil. To guard against bad luck, potlatch hosts once followed certain precautions and acted in a restrained manner. Mourners would not allow themselves to be overcome with grief, the potlatch hosts should be careful not to boast about their wealth, and the guests should be careful not to covet that

wealth. If people acted greedy, or in an egocentric manner, or were careless, they would become vulnerable to *'engii* and could die. If, on the other hand, they refrained from excess and acted in harmony with the world, they would live a long time. Jeanie Maxim (2011) explained that a person should not brag about giving a potlatch; nor should they give a potlatch simply because they could:

> If they ever gonna potlatch, they not supposed to brag about it, they not supposed to do it just because they can do it. They do this because they want to and they feel they should help somebody whoever visit them at the time. Like appreciation, like when people help you in your time of need. Do things with love, not for people to see you. Not to show off with. It's really serious that one.

In the past young women – who might be menstruating – were forbidden to attend the potlatch or enter the building. Children were also not allowed to attend potlatches. Today, children are allowed to attend potlatches, but this creates a dangerous situation for the children, as Jeanie Maxim and Markle Pete (2011) pointed out. They explain that if the children are free to run around, they expose themselves to the spirit of the deceased.

> They say that the spirit of the deceased can take them, the kids with him, the children might die, that's 'engii. And children are not allowed to play outside either, kids are not supposed to be there, especially during the deaths you know, never. Teenager can sit there but they are not supposed to move around, go in and out.
>
> You see that man who passed away; we don't know if his spirit is around, we don't know that. We don't know if he was a good man or a bad man. If he was a bad man, he will be on earth they say, he'll be wandering and trying to get somebody. But if he was a good man he's not there, you know. They knew there was a heaven and hell, and they know the devil. That's why kinds and teenagers cannot go in and out, because nobody knows what kind of person died right there, could have been a bad person, a good person therefore you watch your children from going in and out and walking around outside.

Once the potlatch was over, the hosts had to follow certain rules for thirty days. Bacille George talked about the precautions the hosts had to take. These precautions are to ensure that the hosts will continue to have luck and to make sure that the wealth they have given away will eventually return.

> Eat all alone, take care of your water, stay in your room. 30 days, take care of yourself for luck. If you don't do it you don't be lucky. You don't get nothing. Don't get no furs, no nothing. Everything come pretty slow. Them people who do that for 30 days and go out trapping get all the fur they want. That's what they get rich on the furs. Or selling fish, you can see fish. Everybody want to buy fish, moccasins, any skins. Then you lucky what you give away come back. Some people don't listen, don't believe that and they are broke all of the time. Today forget it all, nobody lucky (de Laguna and McClellan 1958, Box 6.1, 8.28.58).

SUMMARY AND CONLCUSION

The potlatch is the ceremonial linchpin of Ahtna culture. Traditionally, potlatches could be held for many different reasons, including settling a debt or an offense, a hunter's first kill, an adoption, recovering from serious illness, or giving an Ahtna name previously held by someone else to a child. The most important and persistent reason for holding a potlatch, however, is to honor deceased relatives. The hosts and guests

at a potlatch are always from opposite clans. Members of the guests' clan are responsible for digging the grave, preparing the body, and comforting the hosts' families. In a memorial potlatch, hosts serve the food and give gifts to the guests' families. During the potlatch, the bereaved are supposed to leave behind their grief and allow it to transform into joy.

Oratory, song, dance, feasting, and gift-giving are all important components of a potlatch. At every potlatch, clan leaders and other prominent individuals give speeches, although the purpose of these speeches has changed over the past century. Guests sing for the hosts to support their movement through the grieving process. Hosts give away massive amounts of their personal wealth in the form of gifts such as blankets and rifles to show their generosity and repay debts to the guests.

Although it is an ancient institution, the potlatch has undergone considerable changes since the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Christian missionaries considered the potlatch a satanic ritual, and actively suppressed it. This caused a decline in the ceremony during the early and mid-twentieth century. The 1960s and 1970s saw a revitalization of the potlatch, but with some changes due to the influence of Christianity. In the nineteenth century, only relatively high-ranking individuals with considerable resources could afford to hold potlatches, giving away virtually all of their material possessions as part of the ceremony. In modern times, however, a broader range of people can afford to host them.

Potlatches continue to be surrounded with *'engii* proscriptions designed to ensure that misfortune will not befall those who attend. Many of these *'engii*, at least in the past, emphasized the importance of restraint and modesty on the part of the potlatch hosts.

Chapter 7: AHTNA AND COLONIALISM

INTRODUCTION

Colonialism is a broad concept generally referring to the practice of one nation acquiring full or partial political control over another nation, occupying it with settlers and exploiting it economically. It occurs when one nation subjugates another, conquering its population and exploiting it, often while forcing its own language and cultural values upon the colonized people. The history of the United States is a history of "settler colonialism," which Dunbar-Ortiz (2014, 2) defined as "the founding of a country based on an ideology of white supremacy, genocide and land theft."

To justify their actions, colonial powers depict the colonized as the other – uncivilized, primitive, without society, religion, or politics. This depiction sets up a contrast with the colonizer based on binary oppositions, such as savagery versus civilization. Underlying this contrast is the idea of *developmental progress* in which all societies are thought to naturally move from hunting to herding to agriculture and commerce – through an arc of cultural development from savagery to barbarism to civilization, which is assumed to be the height of human development as reflected in European society and culture. This paternalistic view posits that the colonizers are the conveyors of enlightenment, civilization, and modernization – all to improve the lives of the other (Kohn and Reddy 2017).

One way colonial powers reinforce their authority and control is by organizing and classifying knowledge of the other (Kohn and Reddy 2017). In this sense anthropology is a colonial enterprise used to reconstruct Native culture and history into a form acceptable to the dominant society. In Alaska, colonialism endures in a structured set of concepts and discursive practices used to produce, interpret, and evaluate Alaska Native people and culture. Native people endure many negative stereotypes, while nonnative settlers are often very ignorant of Native communities, regarding them as little more than a drain on the state's budget. By insisting all Alaskans, regardless of ethnicity, have an equal right to hunt and fish (e.g., Alaska Supreme Court 1989), the State of Alaska ignores Native culture and relegates Native people to the status of a "user group."

The colonization of Alaska began with the Russians, but their efforts were confined primarily to the land's southern coast. Because of their remote location, Ahtna had only intermittent contact with Russians and avoided the most egregious

Figure 45: Ahtna woman and crying child on Copper River and Northwestern Railway track. Geoffrey Bleakley Photo Collection, Makawao, Hawaii, 2002224.

forms of colonialism. Intense colonization began with the Klondike stampede of 1898, which saw thousands of prospectors crossing the Valdez and Klutina glaciers to the Copper River basin to reach the Klondike goldfields to the northeast. The forces that took hold of Native life following the gold rush of 1898 were rooted in a nation convinced of its superiority, responsibility, and duty to shape the lives of people they deemed "uncivilized." American missionaries representing Christian denominations were scattered to distant lands to "save the souls" of the "less fortunate." Across the entire American continent, Native people had been driven from their lands, subdued in battles, and subjugated to the Euro-Americans' customs and laws (Schneider 2018, xxiii). Alaska was the "last frontier," a vast empty space just waiting to be exploited. Most white Americans assumed that Ahtna, like other Native Americans, would either die or simply disappear. In a relatively short period of time, Indigenous people throughout Alaska have endured profound changes affecting their traditional ways of life. These changes include the atrocities of colonization: genocide, assimilation, epidemic diseases, slavery, child abduction and forced boarding school attendance, language suppression, industrial-scale resource extraction, and Eurocentric federal and state governance.

THE RUSSIANS

As described in Chapter 3, the Russians launched several expeditions to explore the Copper River basin, becoming the first nonnatives to enter the Ahtna homeland. Most of these efforts failed, beset by Ahtna resistance, the physical difficulties in reaching Ahtna territory, or both.

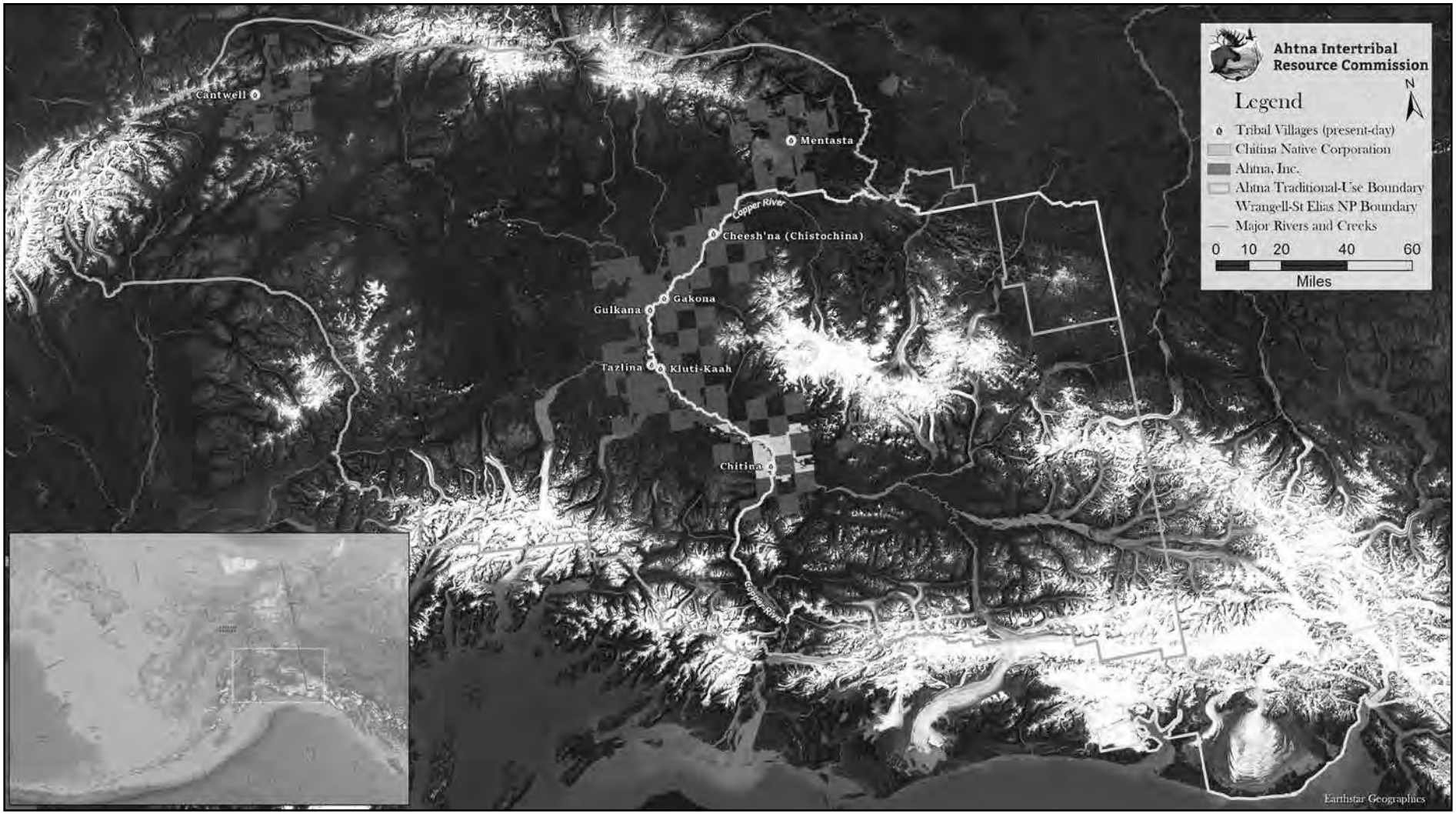
Ahtna occupied a middle position in the fur trade between the vast, unknown interior and the Gulf of Alaska. The Russian American Company (RAC) sent several expeditions to the Copper River with the intent of redirecting the trade to the company's benefit. Eventually the Russians established Mednovskaia Odinochka, a trading post or store located somewhere near the mouth of the Chitina River, discussed in Chapter 3 ("Russian Trade" section). However, Russian presence was entirely dependent on the benevolence of the Ahtna who, at different times, actively resisted the Russian presence.

Ahtna oral tradition tells of two fights that occurred in *Tatl'eahwt'aene*, or Upper Ahtna territory, both of which resulted in the deaths of Russian expedition members (also discussed in Chapter 3). According to Ahtna elders, these fights were the result of Russians being disrespectful, insulting the chiefs with their violence and insolent stares, and raping women.

Ahtna first learned about the Russian Orthodox religion during trading trips to Russian posts in Prince William Sound and Cook Inlet. Dmitrii Tarkhanov attempted to preach to the Ahtna in 1797 (Grinev 1997), but the first official record of formal Russian missionary work among the Ahtna occurred in the late 1840s, when Ahtna were baptized at Knik and Kenai. Ahtna accepted Christianity for various reasons. Baptism was a way to strengthen relations with Russian trading partners, as well as with Dena'ina, many of whom already identified as Christians. Baptism also offered another spiritual practice that helped people cope with the traumas of epidemic disease, such as the smallpox epidemic of 1838. Written records show that after 1840, Ahtna visiting Kenai were more open to baptism because of the devastation wrought by smallpox. Although no official record exists showing the effects of the epidemic, Ahtna elders such as Bacille George recalled the devastation:

> Smallpox killed everybody off. People way out in the country – Tonsina country and the lakes – had houses there. Them people come back here and don't know what happened. They're just the people left today. Everywhere – up Tazlina Lake, way up north, if it wasn't for them nobody would be now (de Laguna and McClellan 1954, Box 5.2, 7.25.54).

In 1886, a story spread among the Ahtna about an Ahtna man who had died, was miraculously resurrected, and lived for six more days before dying again. During those six days, this man told everyone he had a dream in which he was instructed to tell the people they must reject shamanism and accept



Map 2: Approximate boundaries of Ahtna traditional-use territory, land ownership by Ahtna Incorporated and Chitina Native Corporation, and boundaries of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. Map created by Casey Cusick, AITRC.

Orthodoxy (Znamenski 2003, 53). This message fell on ground that had already been fertilized by Ahtna encounters with Orthodox priests. Chief Nicolai of Taral was converted after attending church in Nuchek, the trading settlement at Prince William Sound. Lt. Allen reported that Nicolai wore a Russian cross on his hat and would not tolerate shamans, using the new Orthodox Christianity to compete with them spiritually. His power was believed to be so great that other Ahtna sent him the garments of sick children so that he would cure them. Other Ahtna, such as Chief Andrew, also became devoted to Russian Orthodoxy. But the position of the Russian Orthodox Church deteriorated after the United States purchased Alaska and the American presence expanded. Following the Russian revolution in 1917, the church found it increasingly difficult to support missionary work. Despite continued Ahtna engagement with the religion and requests for pastoral services, the Russian Orthodox Church was unable to advance its work in the Copper Basin. This created a space for American Protestant missionaries who came soon after the gold rush (Znamenski 2003).

THE AMERICANS

Russia ceded Alaska to the United States in 1867. The new territory became a military district, but neither the army nor any other government agency paid much attention to interior Alaska or the Copper River. While the purchase had no immediate effect on the Ahtna, the change in government meant a change in the legal status of Indigenous people throughout the territory.

Russia laid legal claim to Alaska through the Doctrine of Discovery, an agreement between European nations that whichever country first "discovered" a land in the Americas acquired title to it and dominion over its original inhabitants (Dunbar-Ortiz 2014). From the perspective of European law, then, Russia had the legal right to sell Alaska and the United States to buy it.

Figure 46: *Atnahwt'aene* from Klutina Lake, 1898. The women are all wearing homemade dresses, decorated with buttons and strips of cloth. Courtesy of the Valdez Museum & Historical Archive, Wulff (Barry) Collection.

When the United States acquired Alaska, the Treaty of Cession conveyed to the United States dominion over the territory and title to both public and vacant, non-private lands. The treaty stated that "uncivilized tribes," a designation understood to include the Ahtna, would be subject to any laws and regulations that the United States might later adopt regarding aboriginal land rights. In other words, the treaty did not answer the question of whether US law gave the Ahtna any "legal" right to their land (Case and Voluck 2012). The new colonists regarded Ahtna homeland as "white man's country," in the words of US Senator Dillingham (US Congress 1904), chair of a congressional committee who visited Alaska to report on conditions and make legislative recommendations.

In 1885 the United States was still waging war against Native Americans in the lower 48 states. General Nelson A. Miles, a veteran Indian fighter, was put in charge of the Army's operations in the Pacific Northwest. Fascinated by reports from Alaska, Miles sent two expeditions to explore the Copper River. First, he sent Lt. William Abercrombie, who turned back after advancing only fifty miles from Nuchek. The second expedition was launched in 1885, under the command of Lt. Henry Allen, who had orders to assess Native military strength and the capacity of the local environment to support military troops. As the historian William J. Cronon (1992, 41) observed, "Although the Ahtna had heretofore been entirely peaceful in their dealings with Americans, the United States was planning for violence. It was the old frontier story. One way or another an invasion was in the offing."

Figure 47: Members of the Copper and Tanana Rivers Expedition, L-R, Private Fred Wildon Fickett, Lieutenant Henry T. Allen and Sergeant Cady Robertson. Fred Wildon Fickett papers, Archives and Special Collections, Consortium Library, University of Alaska Anchorage.

Accompanied by two handpicked subordinates, Allen ascended the Copper River, crossed the Alaska Range, floated down the Tanana River to the Yukon, crossed overland from the Yukon to the Koyukuk River, and then floated out the Yukon and around to St. Michael on the Bering Sea coast. Altogether, the expedition covered 1,500 miles. Its goal was to reconnoiter "uncharted" territory and to report on the dispositions of the Native peoples, evaluating any threats they potentially would pose to future development of the territory. Allen (1887) provided the outside world with the first detailed information about some Alaska Native groups including the Ahtna, as well as the geography of the Copper River and much of interior Alaska.

Among Ahtna elders, Allen was remembered as a "slim," "nice looking boy" who was friendly and not Russian. Once they realized that Allen had not come to avenge the deaths of earlier Russian parties, Ahtna treated him as an envoy from another nation and offered to guide him. Ahtna elder Douglas Billum was a small boy when Allen came up the river. In this narrative, recorded by de Laguna and McClellan, Billum recalled the names of the Ahtna boys who accompanied the expedition and that

Figure 48: Doctor Billum and family. Geoffrey Bleakley Collection, Makawao, Hawaii, 1999040.

Chief Nicolai traveled with Allen as far as the Gulkana River. Of interest is Billum's comment that the boys accompanying Allen had learned three songs from the Yukon River, taught to them by Upper Ahtna who had traveled there to trade furs. Billum also complained that the United States paid too little for Alaska:

> First time me see was 1885. Lt. Allen come by first. See three soldiers: Lieutenant Allen, [he was] chief; Frickett and one man he cook. One Russian [probably John Bremner, who accompanied the expedition and who Allen had met at Taral].
>
> Russians sell Alaska seven million dollars. [de Laguna notes that Mr. Billum was angry about this]. If they had sold Alaska for 25 million that would have been alright.
>
> Lt. Allen came to Taral, Chitina, Copper River, Mt. Wrangell. All he put down – Copper Center, he name it. Lt. Allen name it.
>
> Interviewer: What did Allen look like?
>
> Lt. Allen slim boy. Fine fellow. Nice looking boy. Not like white man now. Three soldiers come you know. Lt. Allen big man. I little boy. He lift me up. "Nice boy." He talk kind. He lift me and tell me.
>
> Chief Nicolai he see that time. Lt. Allen stay at Taral for a while, and pretty soon the ice melt. And, [Nicolai says] "I'll give you two boys" [for guides]. Two boys come up this way, got seal skin boat, canoes, put in grub, gun, everything what he need. Shoot rabbit, beaver, squirrel, what we eat. Two boys, he give muzzle loader.

> [The boys were:] Taral Jack [of the] udzisyu clan, and Paddy King's [relative], and another boy [who seems to have been the interviewee, Douglas Billum's father, Doc Billum].
>
> First time my daddy he come up there. Maybe seven men go with him. Chief Nicolai go to Gulkana. [He said],
>
> "I don't want Lt. Allen somebody bother him."
>
> Then [C]hief Nicolai, he go back.
>
> That time the two boys, he come down, he get song. Yukon song, I savvy [know] that song [sings song]. Three songs he brought, I know.
>
> When Russian come, he steal my ground. He sell 'em. Me no get money. That's all right me get pension. Seven million too cheap, should be twenty-five million (de Laguna and McClellan 1958, Box 6.2, 7.28.58).

While Ahtna elders considered Allen a nice guy, some took issue with what he wrote. For example, Allen (1887) portrayed Ahtna as having very little food, but Bacille George said this was not true. He had to eat Native food; he couldn't get "groceries," meaning he could not get white man's food. As he went farther upriver, there was no bread or tea, only Indian food. George then compared Allen to the Russians. He said Allen was considered a good man, not like the Russians, so *kaskae* were urged to help him when he came through their areas. George then talked about the sale of Alaska to the United States, and how the Russians sold some of the land, but not the Native people. He compared Allen to the Russians:

> When the Russians sell Alaska to this country, the Russians saying..."I not selling no people. We sell no Indians." They got this on the history book – they got it in Alaska, the same as Lt. Allen's book. They say they only sell the ground, they talk about. The Indian what he do, same thing, he say [Native people could continue their customs]. "We not sell no Indians. Indians take care of himself good. Then everything Indian rights – hunt, trap, what he do, don't take away."
>
> That one help us today, what he say. Indian rights help us today. We never lose it yet. But now states come – we lose it. The Russians don't sell all country – just a little bit. The Russians say. "We don't sell Indians. Don't take away Indians rights, they say."
>
> That's why Lt. Allen say, "We not take away nothing, we don't try to kill you fellows like the Russians. We try to make good for you fellows. We try to help you. When you got hard times, help him, all America. U.S. help other country, that's why we help you too.
>
> Then all the chiefs have meeting together. Then next place they say "we tell 'em that's Americans, they good." [Referring to Chiefs meeting about Allen's arrival.]
>
> The Russians, he come. He never tell "I good. We're good to you people." He just coming. He just move in like big shot. They never have meeting. They don't think about chief [ignore local chiefs]. Indian chief don't like it. That's how they find out Russians no good. Just like he own everything. That's why the Indians think the Russian no good. When they have trouble up there [at Batzulnetas] (de Laguna and McClellan 1960, Box 7.1, 7.8.60).

THE AMERICANIZATION OF THE AHTNA HOMELAND

Since the first Europeans arrived in the Americas, gold has been a central preoccupation. Discovery of gold on the Klondike River, in what is now western Yukon Territory, sparked one of the many gold rushes that had catastrophic effects on Native Americans. In a few years, interior Alaska, which had once been the sole, undisputed province of all Dene, was twisted to meet the demands and expectations of the newcomers. Alaska had become "White man's country," in the words of Senator Dillingham, and the "business of Alaska is carried on by citizens of the United States. It is claimed by them to now be a 'White man's country.' To all intents and purposes, such is the fact. In every contest for gain, the White man has been the gainer" (US Congress 1904). In short order, Ahtna learned that they had no right to the land they had occupied and which had supported them for millennia, that their culture was unacceptable, and that they would either have to change in order to fit the White American version of a good life, or die.

"Everything in US history is about the land," Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz (2014, 1) wrote in her book *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*, "who oversaw and cultivated it, fished its waters, maintained its wildlife; who invaded and stole it; how it became a commodity ('real estate') broken into pieces to be bought and sold on the market." In western thought, space and place are separate. Space is uninhabited – not lived in; it is wilderness and equated with savagery, a place where animals live. There is an imperative to fill empty space and make it productive. Place, on the other hand, is the habitation of humans and is based on the idea of individual ownership – in the western legal system, title is proof of that ownership. Since Ahtna had no title under any recognized legal system, they had no rights to the land except those granted by the United States government. In the Ahtna tradition, land could not be owned or even thought of as the property of one person.[1] Land is not just a physical place, not a "thing" to be exploited and used up, but as a series of relationships.

The Gold Rush and the First Wave of American Settlers

In 1898, approximately 3,000 prospectors swarmed into the Copper Basin, more than double the Ahtna population at the time (Hanable 1982). The newcomers killed game, fished, started forest fires, built roads and towns, and changed the entire environment in which the Ahtna had lived for millennia. Trails turned into wagon roads and, eventually, paved highways that opened up Ahtna territory to the major urban centers of Alaska and determined where the Ahtna live today. Contemporary Ahtna villages are all located along the trails and roads built during this period.

In 1899, the US Army began building a trail from Valdez to Eagle City on the Yukon River, in order to facilitate communications between Alaska's coast and interior. By 1904, it had cleared a trail between Valdez and Fairbanks, opening the Ahtna homeland to settlement. In 1908, construction began on the Copper River and Northwestern Railway. The completion of this project, in 1911, linked the coastal port community of Cordova with the rich copper mines at Kennecott, on the south side of the Wrangell Mountains (Hanable 1982).

The Americans brought an entirely new way of life and thinking. Where the Russians had been hierarchical and autocratic, the Americans were egalitarian and freewheeling. The Russians understood the strict hierarchy of traditional Ahtna culture. The Americans undermined it by introducing the idea of elected leadership, while federal marshals, teachers, traders, nurses, and government bureaucrats usurped the role of the *kaskae* by distributing food and clothing. Where the *kaskae* had been generous, the Americans were stingy, expecting the Ahtna to work for these things.

The chief's authority was also undermined as young Ahtna tried to become modern and independent. Young men found they did not have to work for the *kaskae* but could work for the

[1]The Alaska Native leader William Hensley (2009, 108) wrote: "The notion of private ownership was alien to most of our people. We had lived throughout the length and breadth of Alaska, using the land as our forefathers had, becoming intimate with its ways as it nurtured, however grudgingly at times, our existence […] A house built by the leader of a family would "belong" to him and his relatives in a loose sense[.]"

Figure 49: View of miners using sluice to mine for gold, Slate Creek, Chistochina District, Alaska. Crary-Henderson Collection, Anchorage Museum, B1962.001A.115.

Americans, or themselves. The fur trade was no longer conducted through the *kaskae*; instead, young men and women trapped and sold their furs independently and kept the profits for themselves. But the chiefs did not disappear; they often acted as intermediaries between the Ahtna and Americans. When given the opportunity, Ahtna leaders made decisions in tandem with teachers and government bureaucrats.

In fact, Ahtna were by no means passive subjects of colonialism – while they had limited power to stanch or redirect the onslaught of massive change, many were able to assert their own agency within the rapidly-evolving colonial context. For instance, a few Ahtna leaders were able to take advantage of the new economy the Americans had brought. *Hwc'ele'Ta Ik'e Ngedzeni,* or "Doc Billum," a highly respected Ahtna *denae* and sleep doctor (shaman), operated a ferry that shuttled prospectors across the Copper River. Located at the village of Sdates (upriver of present-day Chitina; see Chapter 8, site 21), Billum's service began during the 1898 gold rush and continued well into the early twentieth century. Ahtna elder Walya Hobson told Reckord (1983b, 116–117) that Judge Wickersham had granted him exclusive rights to operate a ferry service, extending twelve miles above and below the mouth of the Tonsina.

To feed themselves, the newcomers hunted, fished, and trapped, competing with Ahtna for food. Game in interior Alaska has always been scarce and the presence of so many nonnatives made living off the land even more difficult, creating a longstanding problem for Ahtna. At the beginning of the American colonial period, the Ahtna depended on hunting and fishing to feed their families. They traded their furs for "groceries" and sold meat and dry fish to the miners and roadhouses. But to the American

colonizers, the Ahtna homeland was now American territory, and the lands and the resources part of the public domain available to all American citizens.

The fight over wildlife resources began relatively early in the American colonial period. In 1889, a commercial fishery targeting Copper River salmon stocks developed on the Copper River delta (Thompson 1964). Almost immediately, the Ahtna complained to government agents that the commercial fishery was interfering with their ability to catch fish, but nothing was done.

In 1915 the commercial fishery expanded into the Copper River at Miles Lake. The commercial harvest jumped to 653,402 fish in 1915 and 1,253,129 in 1919 (Gilbert 1921). By 1916, the situation for Ahtna became acute, and they protested. Eventually their complaint came to the attention of the US Bureau of Education, the agency then responsible for the welfare of Native people in Alaska, and Arthur Miller, an agent of the bureau working at Copper Center, drafted a formal petition on behalf of the Ahtna.

Responding to pleas by Ahtna that salmon escapements were low, the Bureau of Fisheries launched investigations in 1916, 1917, and 1919, which confirmed local observations and testimony (Bower and Aller 1917; Thompson 1964). Despite these reports, the US Department of Commerce was reluctant to restrict the commercial fishery within the Copper River because it believed that the problem lay with the Native people rather than with commercial activity. Nevertheless, the impending destruction of the salmon runs was well documented (Gilbert 1921), and regulations partially closing the Copper River to commercial fishing were adopted for the 1918 season. Stocks were still depressed in 1921, however, and in September of that year all commercial salmon fishing was prohibited in the Copper River and its tributaries and lakes. The commercial fishery in the Gulf of Alaska remained open.

In 1924, Congress passed the White Act, regulating where, when, and how salmon and other fish could be taken for commercial purposes in Alaska. The US government outlawed not only the industrial harvest methods used on the lower Copper River, but all commercial fishing throughout the river drainage. This made it impossible for the Ahtna to use salmon, a naturally occurring resource in their own home territory, to meet their growing need for cash. Regulating the commercial fishery was, in fact, a way of protecting the capital investments of the cannery owners, who for this reason agreed to the conservation measures (Taylor 2002, 366).

Competition over salmon was not the only problem. The prospectors who flooded into Ahtna territory in 1898 began almost immediately to alter the local environment by burning and clearing the land, as well as competing with the Ahtna for other crucial food resources. As early as 1899, the geologist Oscar Rohn wrote that based on his observations, animal populations in the Copper River Basin were in decline (Rohn 1900). The Ahtna complained to government agents, such as J. H. Romig (1909), that game was in short supply, that white man's food made them ill, and that if they were to make a living, they could not live in one place while their children attended school. They had to follow their traditional patterns and move with the seasons.

A few weeks later, at Copper Center, a conference of chiefs addressed a letter to the Bureau of Education, stating their desire to build a school at Copper Center. At that time, the only school for Alaska Native students in the region was located in Chitina. The chiefs wrote that they do not want to move downriver: "We don't like to go down the river too far to catch fur, no moose, no place to hunt down there." Those signing the letter were Stickwan, Chief of Gakona; Ewan, Chief of Gulkana; Big Jack, Chief of Copper Center; and Tonsina Charlie, Chief of Tonsina (Jones 1913a).

For the government, the issue was how to assimilate Ahtna and create a "civilized" citizen. Education was one pathway. To cut costs, the government wanted to build schools and congregate the Native people in one place. Ahtna resisted, stating they could not hunt if they all lived in one place. Romig (1909) advocated appointing teachers to act as guardians to the Ahtna, controlling their expenditures and conserving natural resources. Colonization and paternalism were the only possible ways to handle the situation, in his view; it was necessary that the Ahtna give up their traditional way of life.[2]

[2]The issue of Ahtna assimilation was discussed in letters written at the time by L. A. Jones (1912a, b; 1913a, b, c), a schoolteacher, and J. H. Romig (1909), a medical missionary. Jones thought education was the answer, while Romig, sympathetic to Ahtna, advanced the idea of relocating them to the Lake Iliamna area so they could become reindeer herders (as discussed in Chapter 3). Both Jones and Romig believed Ahtna needed to settle down and give up their traditional way of life.

AHTNA COPPER AND THE KENNECOTT MINE

Throughout early twentieth century Alaska, few examples of colonial land-theft occurred on as grand of a scale as that of the Kennecott Mine. Up until the passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act in 1971, the US government dodged the issue of Native land rights. Under the Organic Act of 1884, Alaska Natives were left in undisturbed possession of land they already occupied, though they still had no way to secure title or proof of ownership. Congress took two actions that provided a remedy and allowed Alaska Natives to obtain title to land under some government supervision. The first was the Alaska Allotment Act of 1906. The second was the Alaska Native Townsite Act of 1926 (Anderson 2007). These Acts implied that the US government was willing to recognize individual ownership of the land but was unwilling to recognize tribal or collective rights, which meant that large tracts of land in Alaska were considered unoccupied so they could be staked and owned by nonnatives (Case and Voluck 2012, 24).

Like most colonial enterprises, the Kennecott mine was driven by outside interests, completely divorced from any local concern. Unlike Ahtna, whose culture was woven into the local landscape, most of those who participated in the mining enterprise had no connection to Alaska or the Ahtna. Fed and clothed by a transportation system that began in the lower 48 states, most of those connected with the mine thought of the local environment as a space for recreation (Cronon 1992). As often happens once a mine is no longer profitable, those involved simply walked away. Ahtna received no compensation for the land or the minerals extracted from it, though they were allowed to ride the railroad for free (Marshall 2004).

The Ahtna had worked and traded copper for hundreds of years, and it was well known to Euro-Americans that a rich source of the metal existed somewhere in Ahtna territory. Allen (1887) may have been the first nonnative to be shown a source of copper. In April of 1885, he visited Chief Nicolai in the upper Chitina River drainage, and reported that he was shown a vein of copper that

Figure 50: Doc Billum's ferry at Lower Tonsina. Geoffrey Bleakley Collection, Makawao, Hawaii, GB-02-02-22.

in April was above the snowline (Allen 1887, 158). There is some question as to why Nicolai would reveal the source of copper to Allen when, according to most Russian sources, the Ahtna had kept the information secret (Grinev 1993, 1997). One reason given by Ahtna elder Frank Billum was that Nicolai felt Allen was a "nice guy" who wanted to know what Indians knew and wanted their help, in contrast to the Russians who were "pretty bad guys" (Billum 1992). Nicolai did reveal the location of a source of copper to others in exchange for a cache of supplies. For this he has been demeaned by some as an innocent who "traded a multimillion-dollar copper mine for a cache of food" (Janson 1975, 8).[3] Pratt (1998) questioned this narrative, however. While recognizing that Nicolai "could not have realized the potential ramifications of revealing the location of a major copper deposit to the prospectors," Pratt (1998, 90) pointed out that this disclosure did not amount to Nicolai surrendering his source of copper or granting the outsiders permission to exploit it. Instead, he argued that Nicolai had demonstrated himself to be quite canny in his dealings with Euro-American explorers and that his untimely death in 1899 or 1900 played a major role in opening the floodgates to rapid exploitation by outsiders. "Had Nicolai lived longer development of the copper mining industry would have taken a much different course. The industry would have had to contend with a powerful and highly capable chief, and it would have done so with caution" (Pratt 1998, 92).

Figure 51: Panoramic view of Chitina at northern terminus of the Copper River and Northwestern Railroad. Alaska State Library, Walter L. Fisher Photo Collection, P498-28.

Eventually, a syndicate of eastern financiers, including the Guggenheim brothers and the Morgan family, developed the Kennicott valley prospects and built the Copper River and Northwestern Railway to transport the ore to tidewater. The town of Chitina was established, originally as a construction camp for the railroad. Later, it became a stop on the railroad and a commercial center for the region. Both the Native and nonnative populations of Chitina increased until 1938, when the Kennecott Mine closed and the railroad was shut down. The Alaska Road Commission closed its offices in Chitina in 1942, contributing to the decline in population. In 1956, when both the infirmary and the school closed, much of the remaining population dispersed to other places where jobs and health care were available. A small community with a population of about 100 people persists to the present day (US Census Bureau n.d.), including a significant number of Ahtna residents.

[3]In her book *The Copper Spike,* Lone Janson (1975) writes that Nicolai and his people were facing starvation at the onset of winter in 1899.

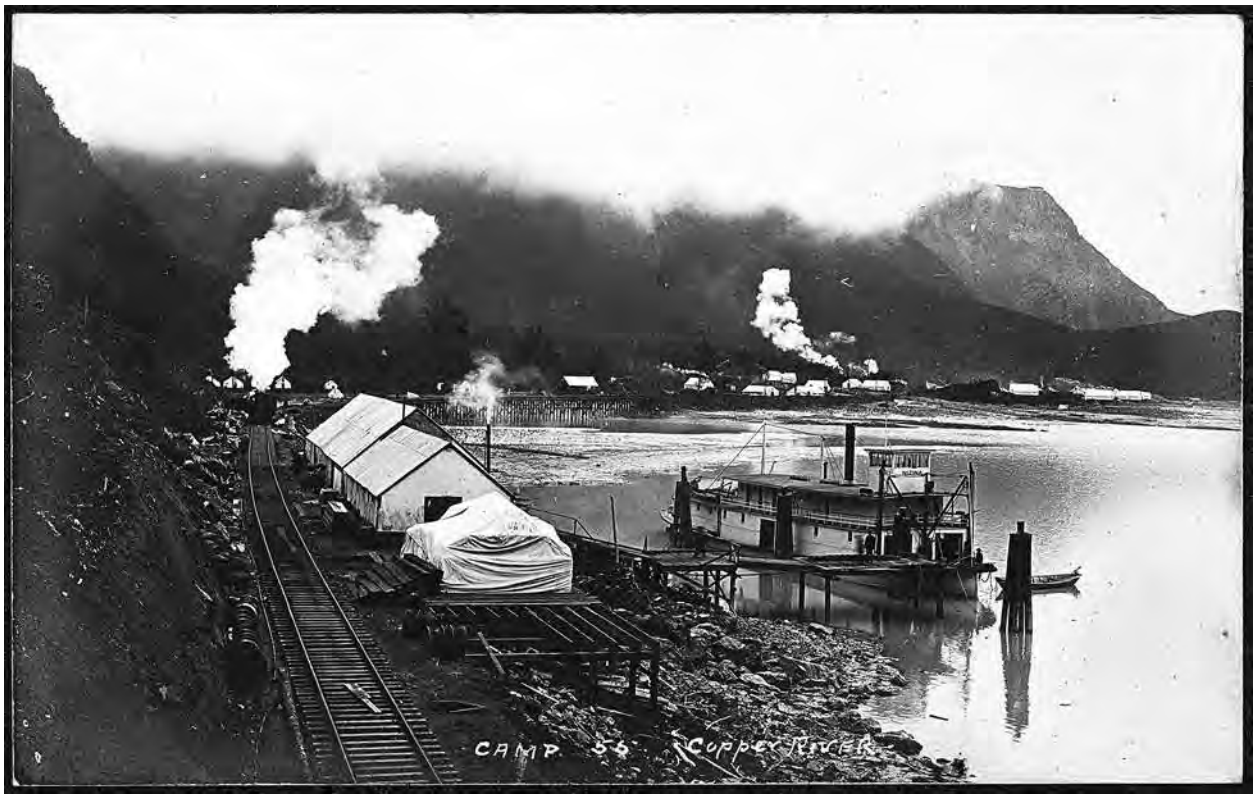


Figure 52: View of Copper River and Northwestern Railway construction camp along Copper River, Alaska, with locomotive in far left background and steamboat at right. John Urban Collection, Anchorage Museum, B1964.001.144.

GAME LAWS

In 1902 Congress passed the Alaska Game Law, which allowed game animals to be killed for food or clothing at any time by Natives, miners, and explorers. Members of the Boone and Crockett Club had advocated for the law, in response to the wholesale killing of game, primarily in the lower 48 states and largely by nonnative hunters. Stories about the unrestricted killing of game in Alaska also flourished. To curtail market hunting, the Game Law created seasons and bag limits and prohibited the sale of meat, hides, and heads "during the time when killing of said animals is prohibited." For example, moose could only be hunted between September 1 and October 31, with a limit of two animals per season. The act included a broad subsistence clause allowing the "the killing of any game animal or bird for food or clothing by native Indians or Eskimo or by miners, explorers and travelers on a journey when in need of food; but the game animals or birds killed so shall not be shipped or sold."

In the summer of 1904, President Theodore Roosevelt sent George Thornton Emmons to investigate the conditions of Alaska Natives. Emmons advised the president and Congress to amend the act and permit Native hunters to sell meat during closed seasons, because preventing Native people from market hunting "deprives the Native of his self-support, and limits the white in his fresh food supply" (quoted in Mitchell 1997, 182). But Emmons' advice was ignored, and when Congress rewrote the act in 1908, it continued the prohibition against the sale of meat during closed seasons and authorized the Secretary of Agriculture to impose even greater restrictions. In 1913, the secretary went further and prohibited the sale of game meat to construction camps along the Alaska railroad and throughout all of Southcentral Alaska, including the Copper River Basin.

The effects of these restrictions on Ahtna were outlined in a letter written by Frank Foster[4] on the behalf of a Taral resident named John Goodlataw. Foster addressed the letter to Charles Sulzer, who was then serving as Alaska's delegate to US House of Representatives. Foster wrote,

> [Goodlataw] cannot compete with the Swedes or Bohunks[5] in the [Kennecott] mines, the only labor market, nor will the white man hire him. He says this country belongs to him and his ancestors and now the government which stops him from getting the where withal to buy sugar, flour, and tea under the plea of game protection has permitted and is permitting the cannery people to take practically all of the salmon from the Copper River as they come up to spawn, making it impossible to catch enough for dog feed or food for himself and his family.
>
> The only source of revenue left to him after the salmon supply was cut off was the sale of sheep meat to miners and prospectors too busy to hunt for themselves. He would like to have the department ruling [prohibiting the sale of moose and sheep meat] relaxed as to Indians. There are only a few of them, and they are fast disappearing (quoted in Mitchell 1997, 183).

Sulzer forwarded the letter to Edward W. Nelson, chief of the Bureau of Biological Survey, the agency within the Department of Agriculture that administered the Alaska Game Law. Nelson responded that to allow Native people to sell game "would nullify the very object of the prohibitory regulation" (quoted in Mitchell 1997, 184).

In 1925, Congress enacted the "Alaska Game Law," delegating the authority to regulate Native subsistence hunting to the Secretary of Agriculture. This act superseded all other game laws and authorized the establishment of a five-member Alaska Game Commission, which did not include any Alaska Natives. One of the biggest problems was how the commission treated Alaska Natives. Regulation 8 of the act allowed Alaskans to kill game and birds "when in absolute need of food and other food was not available." It restricted this right to explorers, prospectors or travelers, and "uncivilized natives" who had not yet "adopt[ed] a civilized mode of living" or "exercise[ed] the right of franchise." Residents, non-residents, and "civilized Natives" had to purchase hunting and trapping licenses, but no license was required of "uncivilized Natives." The definition of "civilized" was linked to the right to vote, or "adopting a mode of civilized living," and was aimed particularly at Tlingit and Haida who lived in towns (Mitchell 1997; Woldstad 2011, 42).

In the late 1920s, federal game wardens began enforcing game laws, and arrested some Ahtna. Around the Chitina River, with its large population of nonnatives, the government imposed strict limits on hunting and fishing. This placed an undue burden on the local Native population. Even after the Kennecott Mine closed and the majority of nonnatives left the area, the regulations were not relaxed, leaving the local Native inhabitants without access to badly needed wild foods. The imposition of game laws, just like truancy laws, pushed the Ahtna to assimilate, to abandon their old way of life, and to conform to the new order imposed by the Americans.

AMERICAN MISSIONARIES

As mentioned earlier, the Ahtna first learned about Christianity when they visited Russian trading posts in Prince William Sound and Cook Inlet. By the early twentieth century, many Ahtna were adherents of the Russian Orthodox faith, and some elders were church leaders. Because the Orthodox Church could not afford to establish missions in far-flung outposts such as the Copper River Basin, however, many Ahtna

[4]Foster was the same lawyer Ahtna elders employed to write letters to the Commissioner of Education requesting that the commercial salmon fishery be removed from the Copper River.

[5]*Bohunk* is a derogatory term used for immigrants from Central or Eastern Europe.

Figure 53: Bible Conference attendees, back row, L-R: Tenas Jack, Martha Goodlataw, Tom Neely, Martha Jackson, Jim Tyone, Bacille George, Buster Gene, Joe Goodlataw, Elizabeth Pete, Adam and Kate Sanford, [unknown], Oscar Ewan, Fred Sinyone [?], and nurse at Faith Hospital, Glennallen. Copper Center; July 4, 1960. Alaska State Library, Frederica de Laguna Photo Collection, P350-60-2-26.

rarely saw a priest. When the Americans arrived at the beginning of the twentieth century, they brought Protestant Christianity, but American Protestants had little luck converting the Ahtna until the Reverend Vincent Joy arrived in the Copper Basin in 1937.

Elizabeth Pete said she remembered the arrival of Reverend and Mrs. Joy and how different they were from other nonnatives because they visited and socialized with the Ahtna. She recalled that "Vince used to lay down on floor with Indians. We never see white people do that before. Those days nobody white ever visit us just Vince" (quoted in Crandall 1983, 47).

Joy was successful because he ministered to Ahtna during a particularly stressful time and because he was persistent. Since the gold rush, Ahtna had faced discrimination, disease, increasing poverty, and alcoholism. They had been pressured to accept the American colonial order but were ironically hindered from doing so by rampant discrimination and other factors that accompany colonialism. As the historian Mary Clay Berry (1975, 25) wrote, anti-Native sentiment was rampant among nonnatives in Alaska.

> In 1944, Juneau was a Jim Crow town where the windows of many bars and restaurants warned "No Dogs or Indians Allowed." Windows in Anchorage and Fairbanks had similar signs. In Nome, seating in the local movie theater was segregated. And after touring the territory the previous winter, a Bureau of Indian Affairs social worker described Alaska to Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Collier as a "territory where race prejudice is more shocking than in the South."

In a discussion with de Laguna and McClellan, Jim McKinley explained the differences between Native people and white people, and specifically missionaries. To illustrate his point, McKinley told the

Figure 54: Graves at Dry Creek, August 26, 1960. Alaska State library, Frederica de Laguna Photo Collection, P350-60-5-26.

story about an Ahtna woman who had lost her son. He said the body was up at the hospital in Glennallen, which was part of Reverend Joy's mission. No one bothered to dress the body – the proper thing to do. McKinley said that any Native would have known what to do, but the missionaries believed since the man was dead there was no need to dress the body. This made the situation worse for the mother. McKinley said "You (missionaries) learn us, we try to learn you, too." He then said a woman died in Northway. In the white people's understanding, Ahtna at Copper Center had no business there, but because she was *Tsisyu*, other members of the *Tsisyu* clan (those living at Copper Center) had an obligation to help the family. Over and over McKinley emphasized the obligation of clans to help one another out, especially in times of crisis. McKinley (de Laguna and McClellan 1960, Box 7.1, 7.5.60) ended the discussion by saying that old white people believed Natives were just like horses in need of training, yet contemporary Natives were quite aware of the broader world, even about politics in Juneau:

> Just short time ago, little boy [died]. Missionary don't understand. Four days laying that body [while] I go to Anchorage. I collect money for coffin. Four days [they] never been dressing [the body]. That poor woman been suffering. We should have been dressing that body. We know that body don't need it – but we should have done it. But we know how they suffer, that woman, that poor blind man.
>
> We k'etnaeyen [are clansmen of the deceased] here. We best loved people in the country – tsisyu, udzisyu, c'cecela'yu [Ahtna clans] . . . . We do best [to help others]. We try to help. Anything happen, we jump. O.K. when I come back […] glad we got nice coffin. We go to hospital. Four missionaries there. I pretty near missionary myself. If somebody die they got to have help. But up there, [that body] still bare, no dressed.

> I tell doctor, "Why don't you tell them to dress the body. You don't dress it [as should have been done]. It's the law, we have to dress that man."
>
> Bible say when you die, your body don't need it. But we think of that poor woman. I tell missionary "You learn us, we try to learn you too." [We spoke about respect for the dead implied by good clothes, coffin etc. Also wanting to help the bereaved.]
>
> One time I lost my boy out in the woods. All tangled up my feelings. Never find him. Nobody can help. They want to help, but can't help men. If his body was there [pointing to the ground] they can help me.
>
> Last winter, that woman die at Northway. We got no business there, white way. She's tsisyu. We go up there... we go up there, buy plywood, make coffin, put coffin...We tell him "can we take the body out?" So they wire sister in Anchorage and she answered "O.K. let them boys take that body out.
>
> So we're that way – we're k'etnaeyen. Best of the history is our tribe, four different tribes but same way. Takes long time to learn us. Missionary stay here 4 years...Ben Gerdes [a missionary]. Now they learn [last 2 years].
>
> That religion [Russian Orthodoxy], then they lost that. Now we got the Bible. I tell my people "I think that's the right way." We got to take time to think about it.
>
> Many years we just like a team [of horses], like training some animals. Old white people think us natives was like that. Well we got to learn to look. We got to study them people. Now we see everything coming – like politics in Juneau. At first he think we dumb. But now he ask [you]; "what you fellows think." But it takes a long time.
>
> Now you – you try to study and make books. That's wonderful. And Dave Shiner [Bible translator]. [Jim implies that de Laguna and McClellan are following Shiner.]
>
> Now we talk about Bacille. We should make a book about him (de Laguna and McClellan 1960, Box 7.1, 7.5.60).

Despite these differences, Ahtna such as Jim McKinley felt that Joy offered them a way through the troubles wrought by colonialism. By the time Joy arrived in the Copper Basin, McKinley had lived through the gold rush, had become a Russian Orthodox lay reader, and had developed an alcohol addiction. McKinley described the process by which he changed as a result of Joy's persistence:

> Well, I am really Athabaskan Indian you know. We've got a different skin, but with Christ we are brothers and sisters. In 1906 when I first saw two black men, I thought then I didn't want to see them. I ran. But it's not that way today. God didn't say, "That man is black; that man is white!" When you come in together into Heaven you say, "Hello, Brother, Hello. Sister!"
>
> I was born at the height of the Gold Rush in 1899 in Copper Center. I was only thirty-eight, when Joy came. For four years I had been lay priest, Orthodox. I heard about God and knew that way by heart with the candles and all those things. I thought I was saved

> and was down on Joy when he spoke about Christ Jesus dying for my sins. I was one of the worst Indians here – I used to be fighting, drinking, all that. Today, every day, I kneel down on my face and give thanks that I have been saved. God made me change my life. That's an important thing. But then I don't believe nothing! Indians believe God is in a lot of different places – in the woods, the mountains – but I don't believe that I don't think about God in those days, just myself.
>
> I was drunk a lot from 1932 to 1946. Sometimes Joy and me had awful times – there was something between us. He wanted to get me. Every time he would see me and say, "Brother Jim, why do you drink? Why don't you come to church and be saved?" He used to go after me pretty strong.
>
> It was Sunday. My son said, "Tonight you can go down with us to church." Joy was preaching and the verse come to me again. "Come unto Me." Tears come to my eyes and I kneel down before Him and pray God forgive all my sins.
>
> You see that little church at the top of the hill in Copper Center! That's the spot where I was saved by Jesus Christ in January, 1946! My brother Vincent, oh he was a glad one when I was saved (quoted in Crandall 1983, 249).

As the Ahtna leaders became grounded in Christianity, they also began to chart their own way. Harry Johns recalled that Reverend Joy helped him to stop drinking:

> The year that I turned away from drinking I know quite a few that left drinking. That was a revival year – that was the turning point in a lot of people's lives. That year in Copper Center and Gulkana I think there were thirty or more people who turned to the Lord, like Thomas Red and his wife, and Crosier and Pete, Barrows and Lincolns – all near that time (quoted in Crandall 1983, 111).

Joy had a vision that included a hospital (est. 1956), a Bible college (est. 1966), a radio station (est. 1964), and what he called village work. This included training Ahtna to become preachers. Harry Johns said that he became a Christian in 1948, started to attend Bible classes in Glennallen during the winter, and eventually became a pastor. He and Jim McKinley were licensed to preach in July 1959. Ben Neeley and Fred Ewan were licensed in December 1959, and the Glennallen Community Chapel ordained all four in 1972.

At the same time, some Ahtna began to question the de facto segregation inherent in missionary activities like Joy's. They pointed out the fact that only Natives attended the Native church and bible camps put together by Joy's mission (Reckord 1979, 49–50).

The government and many religious denominations thought the best way to assimilate Ahtna was to remove their children from the home and to put them in schools. Some children went to village day schools, while others went to boarding schools. Both adopted similar regimes: Natives were asked to aspire to white values and were required to speak English to the exclusion of all other languages.

For Ahtna living a traditional life on the land, school was not considered important. But the government began enforcing truancy laws in the 1930s. Robert Marshall recalled that in 1931 or 1932, he and his parents were staying at 20 Mile, near the present-day Chitina Airport, when three or four men showed up and threatened to take the children away unless they were put in school. Marshall said "they did this all over and parents got excited that they were going to lose their kids and they had to do something." So the family was loaded on a flatbed truck and the colonial agents "dumped us off in Chitina" (Marshall 2004).

While some Ahtna children attended school near home, others – especially orphans – were sent to government boarding schools in Sitka and Eklutna. In the 1940s, a Jesuit priest named Father Buchanan began seeking resources for a regional Catholic school that would prepare Alaska Natives for leadership positions. Eventually, he persuaded the US Congress to give him a land grant of 460 acres just north of the mouth of the Tazlina River. This became the site where the Copper Valley School operated between 1956 and 1971, drawing as many as 150 students from the Copper Valley and other parts of the state (Klemm et al. 2021).

Although children's experiences in the boarding school environment varied, many were traumatized – both by circumstances they suffered at the schools and by being forcibly separated from their families. In some cases, children changed so much that when they returned to their home villages they could no longer get along there. The boarding school experience had several long-term effects. All too often, children suffered abuses that perpetuated intergenerational cycles of abuse in their home communities. Many children who attended boarding school lost the ability to speak their ancestral languages, becoming the first generation to speak only English. Ahtna elder Fred John, Jr., a survivor of boarding schools, described the trauma and loss inflicted by the experience, along with the slow path to recovery from it:

> I got four girls and a son. And I didn't really talk to them for years. I never talked about my boarding school experience probably for about 15 years. I kept a wall around me — an imaginary wall so I wouldn't ever get hurt again. So I never talked about it.
>
> I became an alcoholic. My family kept me together. And when I came back from recovery camp, I told my story there the first time, my whole life story, and it took about three weeks before I start feeling this freedom of telling my story. My kids, they cared about my story. And they know my experience and everything.
>
> People ask me what do you tell your children, I tell them, forgive us. Forgive us for not learning how to make sleds. Forgive us for not making snowshoes and boats and canoes, and all those things that our uncle and our aunties taught us (Alaska Public Media 2021).

Children at boarding school learned to read and write English, learned about nonnative culture, and met other Native children from different parts of Alaska. Later on, these lessons were put to use when a new generation of Alaska Native leaders began to organize and assert their rights to the land.

The effect of nonnative education and loss of language became a critical issue for Ahtna elders. Boarding schools thus led to a generational gap, as well as to a loss of culture. Jim McKinley told de Laguna and McClellan (1960, Box 7.1, 7.5.60) that Ahtna had stopped playing riddling games because the younger people did not understand:

> Lots of guys don't understand. All the young kids now. Pretty near whole village, they can't understand. Their family don't tell them. That's what the trouble it. They don't know. They don't train their kids. They think they go to school – talk with white people. Them kids don't know nothing. I just sad for kids. That's his own way, you know. I'm not against white people, but they let their own ways go. They are Indians, not white people. They shouldn't let their own ways go. Then both ways they learn.

WORLD WAR II: GOVERNMENT DESTRUCTION OF AHTNA VILLAGE SITES

Two events that occurred during World War II had a profound effect on Ahtna and galvanized them into political action. The first was the forced removal of Ahtna from the village of Dry Creek and the second was the destruction of Gulkana Village. These events shocked the Ahtna because the US government acted so arbitrarily

and without warning. Years later, Ahtna elders still recall that people said nothing when the army destroyed their homes in one instance, and built a road through the middle of a village in the other. The Ahtna thought there was nothing they could do because "Whiteman's belonging to everything" (Neeley and Ewan 1987).

Dry Creek

In 1942, the Alaska Defense Command began constructing auxiliary airfields at remote locations in Alaska's interior to serve as emergency facilities for aircraft flying between Alaska and the lower 48 states. In July of that year, the 176th Engineer Regiment of the United States Army arrived in the Copper River Basin with orders to construct an airfield. Construction began in August of 1942 and was completed the following year. The site was designated US Army Gulkana Airfield, and it sat squarely on top of the village of *Latsibese' Cae'e* or Dry Creek, which consisted of three log houses owned by the Stickwans and Ewans. Tenas Stickwan, Frank Stickwan's father, had a large house, which Frank had just built.

In the winter of 1942–43, Ahtna living at Dry Creek were told that their land was needed for national defense and were summarily ordered to leave their homes. When they failed to meet the deadline, the army burned two of the houses. A third one was dismantled and removed from the site. Virginia Pete (2001) remembered that the army came in and told her family to move out. Her grandfather's house was dismantled, and the family, along with the house, was moved to Tazlina.

Jim McKinley and Martha Jackson said that the army drove a road grader right through the cemetery, even though Frank Stickwan told the army "Don't bother the graves" (de Laguna and McClellan 1960, Box 7.1, 7.25.60).

The official US Army record contains nothing about the removal of the Ahtna from Dry Creek. The Ahtna not only lost their homes, but also personal property, including documents showing that the homes at Dry Creek were located on a legal homestead. To obtain compensation, residents were told they would have to file a claim with military authorities at Fort Richardson in Anchorage, but there was no way any resident could get to Anchorage. In the end, families at Dry Creek were never compensated for the loss of their property, and there was never an acknowledgement of the sacrifice they made to the war effort (Ringsmuth 2015).

Gulkana River Bridge

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Ahtna settled seasonally near the mouth of the Gulkana River to be close to the Valdez-Eagle Trail and the telegraph station that was part of the Washington–Alaska Military Cable and Telegraph System (WAMCATS) that ran between Valdez and Eagle. Construction of the Eagle Trail, as it was called, brought further developments to the area, including a roadhouse. Eventually the village became a permanent residence, and by 1920 there were forty-six Ahtna living in eighteen households.

In 1943, Alaska Road Commission crews began building a new bridge across the Gulkana River that required construction of new approaches on both sides of the river. The approach from the west side of the river divided the village in two, passing within a few feet of the village cemetery. The crews gave villagers no warning before starting construction. According to Ahtna who were there at the time, the road graders pushed rocks right up against the people's homes. Annie Ewan (de Laguna and Guédon 1968, Box 8.1, 7.30.68) said, "They picked up everything, they broke coffin, they dug in the graves…everything. They try to find gold or something. What's what they said. They believe…old days, chief, they bury with gold, everything."

None of the Ahtna knew what to do, and they did not know the law in a way that might have enabled them to stop construction. The road berm was so steep that village residents could not climb over it, so that one side of the village was effectively cut off from the other side. The realignment of the road and the construction of the new bridge made Gulkana uninhabitable as a village and unsafe during breakup of the ice on the Gulkana River, forcing resettlement across the river. The new bridge also ruined

Figure 55: The Gulkana River and surrounding valley, including the newly-built Gulkana Bridge, 1944. Alaska State Library, Alaska Road Commission Photo Collection, P61-020-040.

a prime salmon dip-netting area used by the villagers. Shortly thereafter, the Road Commission demolished the old village, leaving a barren gravel pad. In a 1987 interview, Ben Neeley and Glenda Ewan discussed these events, making the point that the Ahtna said nothing because they had for years been led to believe that their country belonged to white people and there was little they could do to stop the government. Said Ewan, "Nobody, nobody said nothing, like he [Ben Neeley] said, the Indians just let it go, just like they thought they were on somebody else's land. That's the way they feel I guess, nobody say nothing" (Neely and Ewan 1987).

Table 7: White vs. nonwhite[1] population of Alaska, 1910–1950

Year	White	Nonwhite	Total
1910	36,400	27,956	64,356
1920	27,883	27,153	55,036
1929	28,640	30,638	59,278
1939	39,170	33,354	72,524
1950	92,808	35,835	128,643

Source: Rollins 1978

[1]Data on Alaska Native vs. nonnative populations are not available for these dates; however, the nonwhite population during this time period was overwhelmingly Alaska Native.

By the end of World War II, highways crisscrossed the Ahtna homeland, including the Glenn Highway, which connects Glennallen to Anchorage. These roads made the region one of the most accessible areas in Alaska. The population of the territory grew rapidly, and communication with the large population centers at Fairbanks and Anchorage became relatively common. The local economy operated on cash, but only a few Ahtna obtained paid employment. As the nonnative population of Alaska more than doubled over ten years, from about 39,000 in 1939 to 93,000 in 1950 (Table 7), nonnatives increasingly dominated local politics and came to take a proprietary view of the surrounding territory. Most of the land was in the public domain and open to any resident for hunting and fishing.

Events during the war showed the Ahtna they had become strangers in their own land, forcing a new political consciousness among the Ahtna, which found expression in the development of Native political organizations and the land claims movement of the 1960s. In 1954, the Ahtna joined the Alaska Native Brotherhood, then formed their own regional organizations, Ahtna T'Aene Nene in 1965 and the Copper River Native Association in 1972. Those involved in these organizations were the same men and women who helped form the Alaska Federation of Natives, worked for passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, and established Ahtna, Incorporated.

Figure 56: Administering the oath to new Alaska Native Brotherhood (ANB) members. From left: Roy Ewan, Kelsey Snell, Harry Johns, Markle Ewan. Photo courtesy of Ahtna, Incorporated.

AHTNA AND THE ALASKA NATIVE BROTHERHOOD

The Alaska Native Brotherhood (ANB) was founded in Sitka, Alaska, in 1912, with the goals of obtaining citizenship for Alaska Natives and settling land claims. Ahtna were one of the few Native groups outside of Southeast Alaska to embrace the political activism of the ANB. The first meeting of ANB Camp No. 31 took place April 10, 1954, at the Copper Center Hall. Harry Johns was elected president, Fred Ewan vice president, Walter Charlie secretary, and Oscar Craig treasurer. There was also an Alaska Native Sisterhood Camp No. 31, which organized and fundraised for ANB members to go to Juneau and Washington, DC. Members included Glenda Ewan, Mary Craig, Mamie Charlie, Mariana Montague, Walya Hobson, and Molly Billum (Craig 2017).

ANB Camp No. 31 existed from 1954 to 1972 and included members from different Ahtna villages. It became the forerunner of Ahtna T'Aene Nene, which later became the Copper River Native Association (CRNA). Members of the CRNA board became the first board of directors of Ahtna Incorporated, one of thirteen regional corporations created by the 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA).

Jim McKinley described the ANB as a "fine thing" because it brought all Native people together, and it was a way for Ahtna to gain some control over the land by limiting the number of nonnatives who could settle in the Copper River Basin. He said:

> Today now we're like brothers – far as Tanana, down to Kenai country. We come back together. So many thousands for years we lost each other, come back together again. We send delegate down to Southwestern Alaska. Right here is headquarters for all this territory. Copper Center Camp and Gulkana Two camps work together. Gulkana take care of Chistochina and Mentasta. 54 the first camp here. Before that it's open… Freezing this land. From Mentasta to Tazuna. No new White people can get title to land, they can settle if the land office says ok but cannot get title and they cannot sell the land (de Laguna and Guédon 1968, Box 8.1, 7.5.68).

Participation in the ANB helped the Ahtna to develop the experience to effectively confront nonnative control and re-assert their rights to the land. Camp members learned to put aside clan rivalries, organizing and acting cooperatively. They elected a set of officers with specific duties, and they learned to conduct business using Robert's Rules of Order. They developed specific goals and campaigned for worthy causes. ANB Camp No. 31 was instrumental in constructing a high school in Glennallen so Native students would not have to attend boarding schools. The group pushed back against racial discrimination, for instance, questioning local missionaries about why no nonnatives attended Native church services or Bible camps. But the most pressing issues were land claims and subsistence.

"IT WAS OURS ALL ALONG"

The issue of Native land claims had been simmering since long before Alaska became a state in 1959. Neither the federal government nor the new state government had addressed the issue. In 1884, Congress passed the Organic Act, which merely reiterated the status quo from the 1867 Treaty of Cession, stating:

> The Indians or other persons in said district shall not be disturbed in the possession of any lands actually in their use or occupations or now claimed by them but the terms under which such persons may acquire title to such lands is reserved for future legislation by Congress (US Congress 1884).

According to the act, any Alaska Native may have rights to land they actually used, such as a fish camp or cabin site. However, there was an assumption that no Alaska Native group would have rights to

large tracts of tribal land. The Statehood Act of 1958 disclaimed all rights or title to land held by Alaska Natives or held in trust for them but did not define the right or title that Natives might have. That was left to the US Congress or the courts to decide, but in the post-war economic expansion, most nonnative Alaskans were not prepared or willing to deal with Native claims to aboriginal title. The historian Mary Clay Berry (1975, 25) described the situation this way:

> During this period of economic growth, the Natives were growing increasingly aware of their rights and asked repeatedly for the protections of reservations. Their petitions were ignored. […] No one wanted to talk about the claims. This issue was a highly emotional Pandora's box: to open it would let out bigotry and greed and fears that were inappropriate in a group of people petitioning for admission to the democratic United States of America.

In 1951 John Billum, Sr. filed the first Ahtna land claim with the Indian Claims Commission. The claim contained a map showing the boundaries of traditional Ahtna territory, stretching from Cantwell to the Canadian border and south to the Bremner River. Although the Indian Claims Commission never acted on Billum's claim, it formed the basis for later Ahtna claims.

Under the Statehood Act, the State of Alaska was authorized to select and obtain title to 103 million acres of land from the public domain, despite the fact that Native claims had not been addressed, and Natives were laying claim to some of the same land selected by the state. In the minds of Alaska Natives, the State's claims represented a new, ominous threat to the use of their traditional lands, because it set in motion a process by which millions of acres would be conveyed to state ownership.

Sometime in the early 1960s, delegates from Camp 31 attended an ANB Grand Camp convention, which provided Ahtna with the opportunity to share their concerns about losing traditionally used lands to homesteaders and the State of Alaska. Roy S. Ewan described the situation facing the Ahtna in the late 1950s and early 1960s as follows:

> All up and down the highway we saw non-Natives moving in, claiming 160 acre homesteads and taking all the best land. There were some who were good, and conscientious, and tried to respect the places where Natives picked berries and had campsites. Others just moved right in and took over, even though camp sites were clear evidence of past use (Hess 1984).

ANB leaders encouraged the Ahtna to form a regional organization that could officially make a land claim. In 1965 Ahtna T'Aene Nene was formed with Louis Lincoln, Adam Bell, and Walter Charlie as board members and John Billum, Jr. as chairman. In January they began discussions about the possible boundaries for a land claim and gave William Paul, Sr., a Tlingit lawyer, power of attorney to pursue a land claim on their behalf (Ahtna, Inc. 1999). In August 1966, Ahtna T'Aene Nene was incorporated under the Indian Reorganization Act with Oscar Craig, Bacille Jackson, Frank Billum, Sr., Beth Jackson, Harding Ewan, and Harry Johns, Sr. as incorporators. Walter Charley was the first advisory board representative (Ahtna, Inc. 1999).

A priority for Ahtna T'Aene Nene was assisting Ahtna in all the villages to apply for individual Native allotments. Signed into law in 1906, the Alaska Native Allotment Act permitted individual Alaska Natives to obtain title for up to 160 acres of land. Applying for an allotment was one way to increase Native land ownership while limiting state land selections.

In October 1966, representatives from Ahtna T'Aene Nene and ANB Camp 31 attended what the *Tundra Times* (1966) called "the Largest Native Gathering in Alaska." This was the first meeting of the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN). Cook Inlet Native Association President Emil Notti called the meeting because the US Commissioner of Indian Affairs had reportedly announced that the Bureau

Figure 57: Harry and Ruth Johns, she's holding doll and purse she made for Frederica de Laguna, in de Laguna's and Catharine McClellan's house, Copper Center; September, 1958. Alaska State Library, Frederica de Laguna Photo Collection, P350-58-7-34.

of Indian Affairs would recommend to Congress the contents of a land settlement, without consulting Alaska Natives. Two hundred and fifty people, representing seventeen Native organizations, attended the meeting. Goals of the meeting were to discuss "common problems" and exert political pressure on candidates competing in statewide elections to support a fair congressional settlement of Native land claims (Arnold 1976, 113–114). Over three days, the participants produced three recommendations: 1) Secretary of the Interior should impose a land freeze so that the State of Alaska could not select lands until Native claims were resolved; 2) Congress should enact legislation to settle Native claims; and 3) Congress would consult with Alaska Natives in settlement of their claims. At the end of 1966, the Secretary of the Interior imposed a land freeze, which not only halted state land selections but also stopped any development of North Slope oil (Arnold 1976, 114). In April 1967, AFN was formally organized, electing Oscar Craig a member of the board and the first Sergeant of Arms. In October, AFN President Emil Notti introduced a Native land claims bill to Ahtna 'T'Aene Nene, whose board approved joining AFN (Ahtna. Inc. 1999).

The most important factor in moving the White House and the Congress toward a settlement of Alaska Native claims was the delay of a pipeline to carry oil from the North Slope to Valdez. Commercial quantities of oil were discovered at Prudhoe Bay on the North Slope of Alaska in 1967 – the largest oilfield ever discovered in North America. By the end of 1969, a group of eight petroleum companies had proposed a 789-mile pipeline from Prudhoe Bay to the ice-free port of Valdez, and the State of Alaska had received more than $900 million in bonuses from leasing 430,000 acres of state land at Prudhoe Bay. The proposed pipeline route would pass through the heart of the Ahtna homeland.

Because of the land freeze, the oil industry became involved in the land-claims process, urging Congress, the president, and the state to settle. Nick Jackson (2012) said that Ahtna leaders such as Harry Johns and Markle Ewan faced a lot of pressure from the oil companies to settle the claims and build the pipeline. The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA), a monumental law attempting to resolve the land-claims issue, was signed in December of 1971.

Under ANCSA, Alaska Natives were entitled to 40 million acres of land and $962.5 million in compensation for claims that were extinguished by the settlement. A principal feature of ANCSA was the formation of regional and village business corporations. Regional corporations were formed along the boundaries of the twelve regional Native associations listed in the settlement. The Copper River Native Association (CRNA) was one of those 12 associations. CRNA was formed in February 1972 and included all eight Ahtna villages (Reckord 1979, 17). Alaska state law and ANCSA stipulated that each regional association name five persons whose responsibility was to incorporate as a business. Some on the CRNA board became incorporators of Ahtna, Incorporated, the for-profit Alaska Native corporation for the region, which formed in June 1972.

Benefits from the settlement would accrue to Native people through the regional and village corporations. All eligible Native people would become shareholders of these corporations. Ahtna, Incorporated was the smallest regional corporation in terms of number of shareholders. The amount of land and money villages would receive was based on the number of people enrolled. Ahtna, Incorporated was entitled to receive 1.77 million acres of land and about $13 million. Initially there were seven village corporations in the Ahtna region. In 1972, Ahtna went to court in order to add Cantwell.

Figure 58: Herbert Smelcer, Deputy Director and Regional Planning Coordinator for [Ahtna, Incorporated], reviews village and regional selection at a public hearing in Copper Center, March 1973. Dave Hickok Collection, Anchorage Museum, B2009.049.2.

The Ahtna land selection committee included Millie Buck from Chitina, Herb Smelcer from Tazlina, Sam George from Copper Center, Nick Jackson from Gulkana, Harold Gene from Gakona, Lillian Boston from Chistochina, Nancy Craig from Mentasta, and Ruby John from Cantwell. The process included enrolling people from each village, which meant creating genealogies. In the late 1970s, a nonnative individual tried to claim

that Chitina was not a village, resulting in an arbitration hearing at the Copper Center Hall with genealogies displayed. Chitina was declared a village. Ahtna, Incorporated paid for the arbitration (Jackson 2012).

In 1980, seven of the eight village corporations in the Ahtna region merged with Ahtna, Incorporated. These included Cantwell, Mentasta, Chistochina, Gakona, Gulkana, Tazlina, and Kluti Kaah (Copper Center). Ahtna, Inc. assumed management of the lands of the seven merged corporations; however, under the terms of the merger agreement, the former village corporations were permitted to maintain shareholder committees, known as Successor Village Organizations (SVO), each of which retains the right to reasonably withhold consent to new development of former village lands. Chitina chose not to merge with Ahtna and retains rights to the surface estate of its lands.

Figure 59: Roy Ewan, [Ahtna, Incorporated] Executive Director, reviews Mentasta Lake's Village selection with Fred John [Sr.], village planning coordinator; March, 1973. Dave Hickok Collection, Anchorage Museum, B2009.049.1.

In a recent interview, the late Ahtna elder Roy S. Ewan (2017) made the point that ANCSA was not passed to appease the Native people of Alaska, nor was it a land giveaway. The settlement was Native people's right; it was their land to begin with.

> We base our claims on aboriginal right you know, aboriginal use of the land. That's what we based our settlement on. Our claims just like anybody who would put in a claim for like insurance policy or something like that. I want that to be clear because this was not a gift from Congress or anything. We had a claim, a legitimate claim. A right to the land, we claimed it under aboriginal rights. We were the only people here before the Russians. Before anybody. It was ours all along.

One consequence of ANCSA is that the vast majority of Alaska's 227 federally recognized tribes (US Department of the Interior 2023), including all eight in the Ahtna region, do not have land-bases. This has at times contributed to tension between the tribes, which are recognized as sovereign governments, and the for-profit corporations, which often wield great power due to their land-bases, money, and other capital. The tribes' priorities as governments obligated to represent their citizens' interests sometimes clash with those of the corporations, which have a fiduciary responsibility to create value for their shareholders. For example, a common pattern throughout Alaska is for corporations to support development projects on or near their lands, while local tribes often oppose these same projects. In a majority of regional Native corporations, including Ahtna, Inc., Alaska Natives born after the passage of ANCSA do not receive shares in their regional corporations by birthright, but become shareholders only if they receive or inherit shares from family members. In some cases, this has contributed to intergenerational discord.

In the 2010s and early 2020s, an international renaissance of grassroots activism around Indigenous rights emerged, and has included a "land back" movement, advocating for tribal governments to gain title to their ancestral lands. In the Ahtna region, at least one tribe has recently completed such a land acquisition effort. In 2023, the Native Village of Tazlina reacquired the land on which the Copper Valley School had been located (Simeon 2023). The school burned down in the mid-1970s, creating an asbestos contamination hazard that locals have blamed for some cases of cancer in the area. The Catholic Archdiocese of Anchorage, which held title to the land, eventually paid to have the site cleaned up, and sold the land partly in an effort to recover cleanup costs (Swinehart 2021). In a 2021 editorial, the Native Village of Tazlina Tribal Council discussed its visions for the future of the site:

> Although subsistence fishing continues to be a critical part of our culture and livelihood, it is not the only purpose we envision for these lands, which sit at the heart of Tazlina's traditional territory. We aspire to reclaim this site as a hub to revitalize and continue our culture and traditions. We envision establishing a tribal college and cultural center, conducting fisheries research, constructing a new green energy tribal meeting and church hall, and building a community garden (Native Village of Tazlina Tribal Council 2021).

CUSTOMARY AND TRADITIONAL: THE STATE OF ALASKA AND THE ISSUE OF SUBSISTENCE

After World War II, competition from urban hunters and fishers intensified. Highways provided easy access to the Copper River Basin, so that between 1960 and 1970, for example, the number of salmon fishing permits issued for the upper Copper River subsistence fishery increased by 96 percent (Simeone and Fall 2003, 21, 32). Faced with such unprecedented growth, state managers imposed restrictions on salmon fishing in the upper Copper River. In 1964, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) closed all tributaries of the Copper River – and the main channel of the river above the Slana River – to subsistence fishing. This change, which was made without consulting the Ahtna, effectively criminalized their use of traditional fishing sites on the Tonsina, Klutina and Slana rivers.

Claiming their concerns had not been taken into account, members of ANB Camp 31 confronted ADF&G. State managers justified these restrictions as a way to allow additional salmon to escape to the spawning grounds and protect fish from being overharvested on the spawning grounds. Managers also believed the closure would limit the growth of the upriver fishery, which they thought was fast becoming a

recreational fishery as the number of people who actually depended on salmon for their livelihood was in decline (Alaska Department of Fish and Game 1966, 207).

ANB pointed out that the new regulations restricted the ability of Ahtna to harvest salmon and made it difficult to dry fish in the traditional manner. They also emphasized their need for the salmon, asking for more input into the regulatory process. In June of 1964, Markle Ewan told state management biologist Ralph Pirtle that he did not agree with regulations that placed seasonal limits on subsistence harvests:

> The majority of our Indian people don't have deep freezers, therefore our main dependable storage food is dried, smoked, salted and canned fish. Believe it or not – one person can eat as much as two fish a day whether fresh or otherwise. So please permit us to get as much fish as we need. As you know, we don't take or waste any fish or game like so many sport fishermen and hunters do. We are God abiding citizen people. I don't believe the whole Copper River tribe will get as much fish in a whole season in Copper River area as the commercial fishermen would get in one day (Ewan 1964).

Ewan invited Pirtle to a meeting of the ANB so that, as Ewan stated, "we can better understand each other and our problems and become better acquainted" (Ewan 1964). Although Pirtle accepted the

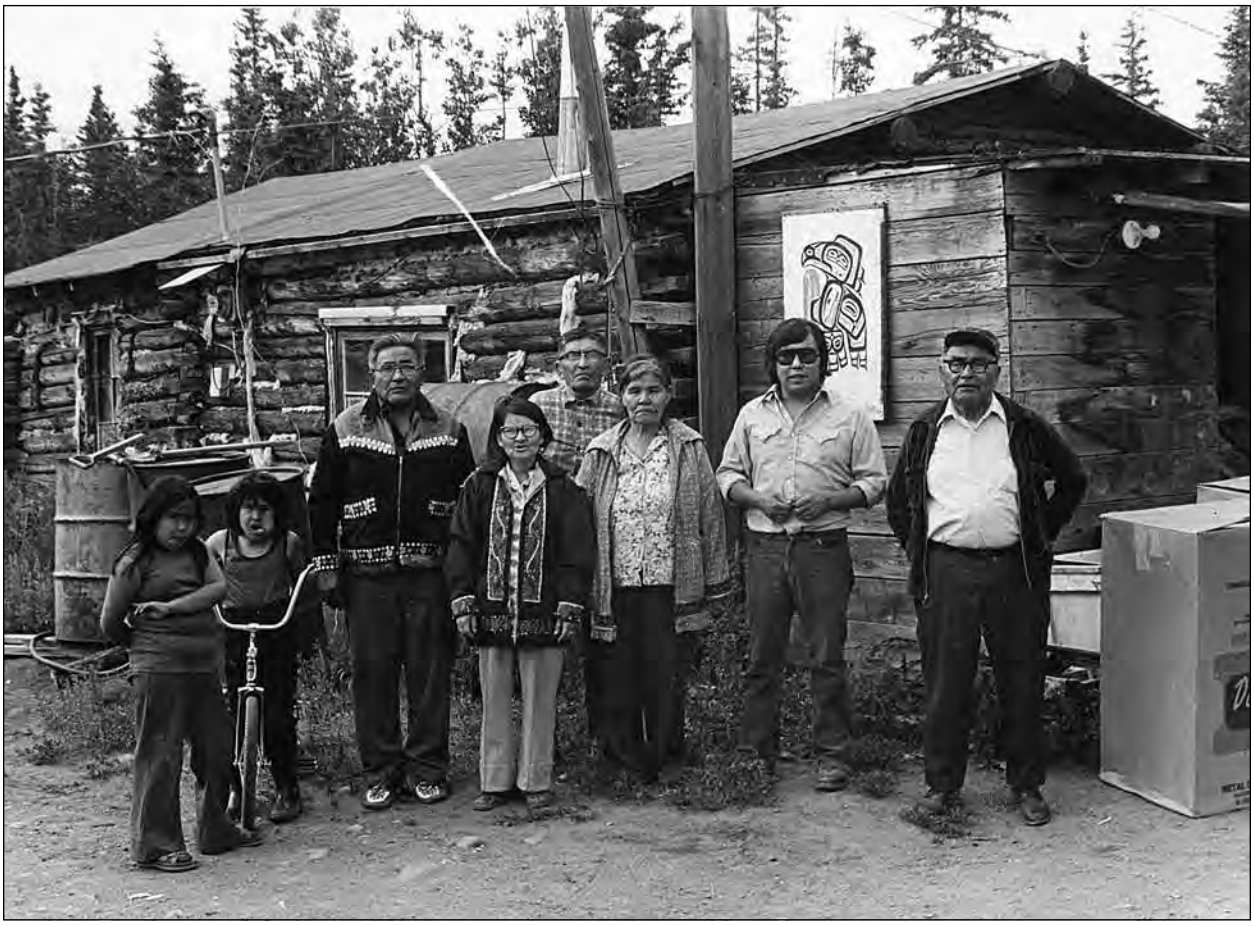


Figure 60: Pete and Annie Ewan (in beaded coats), with friends and family in front of their Copper River home. Annie was one of four fishermen who were arrested by the State of Alaska for attempting to fish on a weekday, during a closure. To Annie Ewan's right are Joe and Morrie Secondchief of Mendeltna, and Kenny Johns of Copper Center. At far right is Tenas Jack, 78, of Copper Center. To the left of the Ewans are grandchildren Nellie and Nathan Ewan. Photo courtesy of Ukpeagvik Iñupiat Corporation and Tuzzy Consortium Library of Utqiaġvik, Alaska.

invitation, there is no record of the outcome of the meeting. The Ahtna did not succeed in eliminating the regulations, and problems in the fishery did not go away.

ANCSA had "extinguished" aboriginal hunting and fishing rights, but Congress directed the state and federal governments to provide for those rights. Responding to the increased pressures on wildlife resources brought about by the oil boom, the state began to recognize the special claims of subsistence users. In 1978, the Alaska state legislature passed the first comprehensive subsistence law, giving priority to subsistence uses of fish and wildlife. However, it did not address the question of who a subsistence user was.

That same year, Ahtna and ADF&G again clashed over closures to the salmon fishery. ADF&G closed the upper Copper River subsistence fishery during the week, allowing fishing only on weekends. Four Ahtna elders were arrested for attempting to fish on a weekday. Their fish wheels were locked up by ADF&G, and the state threatened to prosecute the four. CRNA objected to the weekday closures, saying it favored non-basin residents over locals. Speaking for a majority of Ahtna, CRNA President Robert Marshall said that he did not like the way the new closures were implemented. He objected to the fact that Ahtna elders ranging in age from 79 to 94 had their fish wheels locked up. He further noted: "Indians need fish to survive, the older people cannot survive without fish through the winter! Indian people (Older) did not come right out and say but they are actually begging to be able to catch fish" (Marshall 1978). It is not known whether these actions by Ahtna had any effect, but ADF&G eventually lifted the restrictions.

Additional conflicts between Ahtna and the state arose over Nelchina caribou herd harvest regulations. Like the salmon fishery, the Nelchina caribou herd has been accessible by road, attracting thousands of urban residents. The state crafted hunting regulations that accommodated sport hunters but did not account for the customary and traditional use patterns of Ahtna. In early 1980, Gulkana resident Danny Ewan was cited after shooting a caribou near Ewan Lake during a closed season and without a permit. Ewan argued that the regulations did not provide for his subsistence needs. He could not have killed a caribou during the open season because there were no caribou in the vicinity, and he would have needed to charter a plane to access the caribou, something he could not afford. The court agreed and dismissed the case, stating the Alaska Board of Game (BOG) had acted in a "manner inconsistent with AS [Alaska Statute] 16.05.255(b) [now AS 16.05.258 (b)(1)], since it had accommodated sport hunters while failing to provide for the subsistence needs of the defendant." To accommodate subsistence hunters, the board created a separate subsistence hunt in 1981, with eligibility based on local residency, reliance on wild foods, and annual household income below $12,000.

ANILCA AND THE CREATION OF WRANGELL-ST. ELIAS NATIONAL PARK AND PRESERVE

Not only did ANCSA grant large tracts of land to Alaska Native corporations, but it also set the stage for designations of federal lands as conservation system units, with major implications for the future of the Ahtna homeland. An *ad hoc* group of environmentalists saw the bill as an opportunity to advance their objectives, and successfully lobbied to include provisions to protect large tracts of land as wilderness areas. The 17(d)(2) section of ANCSA (commonly referred to as the d-2 lands), authorized the US Secretary of the Interior to nominate up to 80 million acres of land as national parks, national monuments, national forests, wild and scenic rivers, and other protected designations. These lands had to be selected within two years following the bill's passage, after which Congress had an additional five years to confirm the proposals. During this interim period, neither the State of Alaska nor the newly formed Alaska Native corporations could select lands that the Interior Secretary had nominated (Catton 1997, 196–97).

The area of the Wrangell, St. Elias and eastern Chugach mountain ranges had long been noted for its outstanding mountain scenery and had been proposed as a national park site since the 1930s (Bleakley 2002, 11–12). In 1972, the Interior Secretary announced a preliminary set of d-2 withdrawals that included millions of acres of land in this region as a national park and preserve. While the size and status of the proposed protected areas underwent several changes during the following years, each proposal included most of the Ahtna homeland east of the Copper River (Williss 2005, 53, 61). In an effort to address these land selections,

Figure 61: President Jimmy Carter celebrates after signing the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act on December 2, 1980. National Archives photo number 166691808.

the first version of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) was introduced before Congress in 1977. Ultimately, after five years, two changes of presidential administration, and extensive negotiation, Congress failed to pass the necessary legislation in time to meet the deadline stipulated in ANCSA. In large part, this was due to concerted opposition from Alaska's congressional delegation and other political leaders. In response, President Jimmy Carter's administration turned to executive action, invoking a federal law called the Antiquities Act to establish seventeen new national monuments totaling 56 million acres of land, including an 11-million-acre Wrangell-St. Elias National Monument (Bleakley 2002, 20–21).

The Carter Administration's move drew a ferocious reaction from many Alaska residents – both politicians and members of the public – who feared that it would restrict their ability to extract resources and make a living off the vast swaths of land withdrawn for protection. In the Copper River basin, nonnative residents refused service to, and even threatened violence against, National Park Service employees who were sent to administer the new monument. Among the Ahtna, however, the reaction to these developments was mixed. Many supported the establishment of protected areas in response to concerns about excessive competition from sport hunters and fishers and degradation of the habitat they depended on for their subsistence lifeways. The monument designation allowed Ahtna to continue their subsistence activities. Additionally, the federal monument would require infrastructure to support it, potentially bringing jobs and economic opportunities to Ahtna, Incorporated. But tensions also existed between Alaska Native groups and the interest groups advocating land conservation. Alaska Native people felt their voices were sidelined at various points during the discussions around land selections and the creation of protected areas (Catton 1997; Higgins 2015).

Despite the controversies, the land withdrawals under the Antiquities Act ultimately created impetus for the passage of ANILCA in December 1980, during the waning days of the Carter administration. An 8,147,000-acre Wrangell St. Elias National Park and adjacent 4,171,000-acre National Preserve superseded the monument that had been established two years earlier. In the lives of most Ahtna, the short-term impacts of park creation were relatively minor. Ahtna had moved away from virtually all their settlements on the east bank of the Copper River by the mid-twentieth century (Miller 2023), and nobody lived on lands claimed by the new park. Nevertheless, a significant portion of the ANCSA lands that were conveyed to Ahtna, Inc. formed discontinuous tracts on the east side of the Copper River that were now surrounded by parklands. As Bleakley (2002, 68) has pointed out, this limited their potential for economic development. Significantly, ANILCA allowed for subsistence activities, as well as most motorized access for subsistence purposes, within both the park and the preserve. While the ban on sport hunting and guided hunting in the park was controversial among nonnatives in the region, it reduced the competition that subsistence hunters faced. Nonetheless, at least one Ahtna family with a guiding operation reportedly went out of business after the creation of the park, while others felt that they had not had a chance to realize the economic development opportunities that had been promised (Higgins 2015).

Ahtna elder Wilson Justin (2015) said that although many Ahtna had supported the park for pragmatic reasons, they felt the NPS has not properly acknowledged or respected the Ahtna worldview:

> There never was any real what you would call friendship with the national park. We supported the park, because we wanted the park to protect the game and the habitat and the rivers and the waters. Realizing early on, from so many decades of guiding, that the game resources were being punished by the influx of many hunters.
>
> But we never were what you would call friends with the park. In our traditions, the park would be a uninvited guest.
>
> So we – what we tried to do as – my family and the rest of the people who are still – like my Aunt Lena [Charley], who are still a part of the old thinking.
>
> What we tried to do was prepare a talking place for the park, which the old chiefs, they used to say, "We have to talk right. We have to do things right. I'll get a place ready for us to talk."
>
> That's what my family tried to do with the national park. And, of course, the park only wants to talk about what the park needs to do.
>
> So the inability of the park to sit down and – like Katie [John] would say, we want Kennecott back. The park could have, would have, should have sat down and say let's examine that statement, and put that statement in context for all of the future managers.
>
> That's what Katie would've wanted, was to put a monument up of words that is really accurate for the record.
>
> So when we attempted to put a talking place, not a meeting place, but a talking place, together for the park, it was all about historical records.

DUAL MANAGEMENT: SUBSISTENCE AND THE LEGACY OF ANILCA

In many ways, ANCSA had left the question of Alaska Native subsistence unresolved. The act extinguished aboriginal hunting and fishing rights for Alaska Natives, but a report from the joint US House-Senate committee considering the legislation prior to passage stated that that "The Conference Committee expects both the [US Interior] Secretary and the State to take any action necessary to protect the subsistence needs of the Natives." Nevertheless, Anderson (2016, 204) pointed out that "ANCSA's affirmative elimination of aboriginal hunting and fishing rights has had devastating effects on Native subsistence uses and has made it extremely difficult for Native tribes to have a role in co-management by virtue of their reserved tribal rights."

> Originally, Title VIII of ANILCA restored subsistence as a civil right. However, the final version of ANILCA did not, in fact, completely fulfill this promise. In a compromise with the State of Alaska, the act extended the subsistence priority to all rural residents, both Native and nonnative. Rural residents now had a priority over urban residents for subsistence hunting and fishing on federal lands when wildlife resources became scarce. One effect of this was that Alaska Natives who resided in urban areas had no priority or aboriginal rights to hunt or fish on federal lands. This has disenfranchised the increasing numbers of Ahtna who have moved to urban communities such as Anchorage and Fairbanks.

One of ANILCA's stipulations was that the state was allowed to manage wildlife resources on federal lands as long as the state complied with the rural preference in ANILCA. In 1978, the state passed its first subsistence law, making customary and traditional uses or subsistence a priority over commercial or sport uses of wildlife resources. The state amended its subsistence law in 1982 to give hunting and fishing priority to rural residents in times of scarcity, bringing the state into compliance with ANILCA's stipulations. In the 1989 court case *McDowell v. the State of Alaska*, the Alaska Supreme Court judged this amended law unconstitutional because it violated a clause in the state constitution guaranteeing all Alaska residents equal access to fish and wildlife resources. This decision meant that the state was no longer in compliance with ANILCA, and in 1990, the federal government took over management of wildlife harvests on federal public lands by federally qualified rural residents. Other people can hunt and fish on most of these lands under State of Alaska regulations. (The exception to this is wildlife harvests on lands designated as a national park, which are only open to NPS-qualified rural residents.) Several times during the 1990s, the Alaska legislature considered amending the state constitution, but each time the initiative failed to garner the two-thirds majority of legislative votes needed to put proposed constitutional amendments before voters (Norris 2002).

Ramifications of the McDowell decision became evident in the Kluti Kaah case. In 1991, the Board of Game (BOG) established a seven-day moose hunt in Game Management Unit 13, which includes most of the Copper River basin. The hunt was open to both sport and subsistence hunters. Originally, the BOG had wanted a longer subsistence season, but the Alaska Department of Law advised that the McDowell decision implied that a separate subsistence hunt would not be legal. The BOG could not offer subsistence hunters a different season, because that would discriminate against sport hunters. The residents of Kluti Kaah (Copper Center) went to court asking for a 26-day-long hunt. Ken Johns testified that the seven-day season was too short and simply a "sport hunt" that did not provide opportunity for the Ahtna to pass on traditional knowledge to their children or to meet their subsistence needs. The district court sided with the Ahtna and allowed a longer hunt. The state appealed to the Alaska Supreme Court. The state argued that extending the hunt would give residents of Kluti Kaah an unfair advantage over other subsistence hunters. Furthermore, extending the hunt would threaten the local moose population since all other subsistence users would want the same treatment.

The Supreme Court ultimately sided with the state. Chief Justice Jay Rabinowitz, in his dissenting opinion, argued that "to compress the long standing custom into a sport hunter's seven-day 'vacation' is to legislate a substantial departure from the historical subsistence hunting experience" (Alaska Supreme Court 1992). In Rabinowitz's view, the state failed to account for the "customary and traditional" pattern of moose hunting by the Ahtna.

In the early 2010s, the McDowell decision was again leveraged to the benefit of urban hunters seeking access to hunting opportunities in the Ahtna region. In 2009, the Alaska Board of Game tried to address concerns that urban hunters were outcompeting Copper Basin locals in state moose and caribou hunts by creating a "community subsistence harvest" hunt in the region. The hunt included some liberal provisions that made it more attractive than other state hunts in the region. It was quickly challenged, and courts ruled that it had to be open to all Alaskans. By 2016, some 3,400 hunters – mostly urban residents – were competing for a quota of 100 moose (van Lanen 2017, 274–75).

As the Ahtna, as well as other Alaska Native groups, have become increasingly urbanized, ANILCA's provisions have created some discord within communities. By 2010, a majority of Alaska Natives (52%) lived in urban nonsubsistence areas (Fall 2016, 50), meaning that they do not have access to the federal hunting and fishing opportunities provided under ANILCA. Nonnative residents of the Copper Basin and other rural areas, some of whom have lived in the region for only a very short time, are afforded more hunting and fishing rights than urban Ahtna whose ancestors have lived in the region for millennia. At times, this has created disagreement between rural Alaska Native groups and those living in the cities.

One way the Ahtna have attempted to assert greater agency around subsistence issues is through the creation of an intertribal organization dedicated to managing fish and wildlife in Ahtna traditional territory. In 2011, Ahtna tribes and corporations formed the Copper River – Ahtna Intertribal Conservation District, which is today known as the Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission (AITRC). AITRC's mission is to "conserve, develop, and use our fish, wildlife, and plants for the well-being of our people and future generations." The organization engages in fisheries and wildlife research, in the state and federal management processes, and in projects relevant to issues such as resource conservation.

KATIE JOHN AND DORIS CHARLES TAKE ON THE STATE OF ALASKA[6]

In 1983, Ahtna elders Katie John and Doris Charles, along with the Mentasta Village Council, proposed to the Alaska Board of Fisheries that they be allowed to fish at Tanada Creek, which the state had closed to fishing in 1964. When the board refused, John and Charles filed suit against the state. Under ANILCA, the state had retained management of fish and wildlife resources on federal lands if it complied with ANILCA and maintained a rural subsistence priority. Through their lawyers, John and Charles said that the state was in violation of the ANILCA section 804 subsistence priority because it allowed commercial fishing at the mouth of the river but did not permit subsistence fishing in Tanada Creek. The state opposed opening Tanada Creek to fishing, believing that existing regulations had "provided reasonable opportunity for Copper River subsistence fishermen to satisfy subsistence uses." In other words, John and Charles had plenty of opportunity to fish elsewhere on the Copper River. State fisheries managers also believed salmon stocks in the upper Copper River and Tanada Creek were particularly vulnerable to overharvest (Ahtna, Inc. 2022).

After months of negotiations, the state agreed that even though existing regulations provided John and Charles a reasonable opportunity to fish, it would provide "additional" opportunity in "excess of the reasonable or necessary opportunity provided downstream of Slana" (Alaska Board of Fisheries 1988). But John and Charles considered the regulations stipulated by the state to be too narrow.

The state viewed the situation in terms of conserving the salmon for the greater good. Closing tributaries of the Copper River to subsistence fishing was one method of controlling the expansion of

[6]Most of the text in this section originally appeared in Simeone (2018) and was later published as an article in the journal *Alaska Park Science* (Ahtna, Inc. 2022).

Figure 62: Katie John stands near her fishwheel on the Copper River in Alaska in July 1994. Courtesy of Erik Hill (photographer), Anchorage Daily News. ADN Archive 1994.

the fishery and protecting specific salmon stocks from being overfished. While the Board of Fisheries was willing to provide limited opportunity to fish on Tanada Creek, that was not enough for John and Charles. Batzulnetas, the natal village of John and Charles, was the perfect place to fish. Salmon had been taken at Batzulnetas for hundreds of years, or longer, and Ahtna considered it one of the preeminent fishing spots on the upper Copper River. John considered fishing at Batzulnetas to be part of the legacy she would leave her grandchildren (Ahtna, Inc. 2022, 55). In 1994, she told a reporter:

> I told you how many grandchildren I have. When I'm gone, how are they going to live? They got to have some way. They got to remember the way I learned. If they don't, they're going to be lost and won't know where they are … I don't do this for myself. I'm too old for that now. I'm thinking about the many days ahead (quoted in Hulen 2016).

John and Charles then petitioned the court for redress and received a preliminary injunction allowing them to fish at Batzulnetas. The court then declared the State of Alaska's 1988 subsistence regulations invalid and ordered the Board of Fisheries to pass new regulations that provided a subsistence priority at Batzulnetas. However, at this point the Alaska State Supreme Court declared the state's subsistence law unconstitutional. As a result, the state was no longer in compliance with ANILCA, which meant that the state could no longer manage subsistence harvests of these resources on federal land. ANILCA is clear that sport hunting is allowed in national preserves, and sport fishing is also allowed in both park and preserve lands.

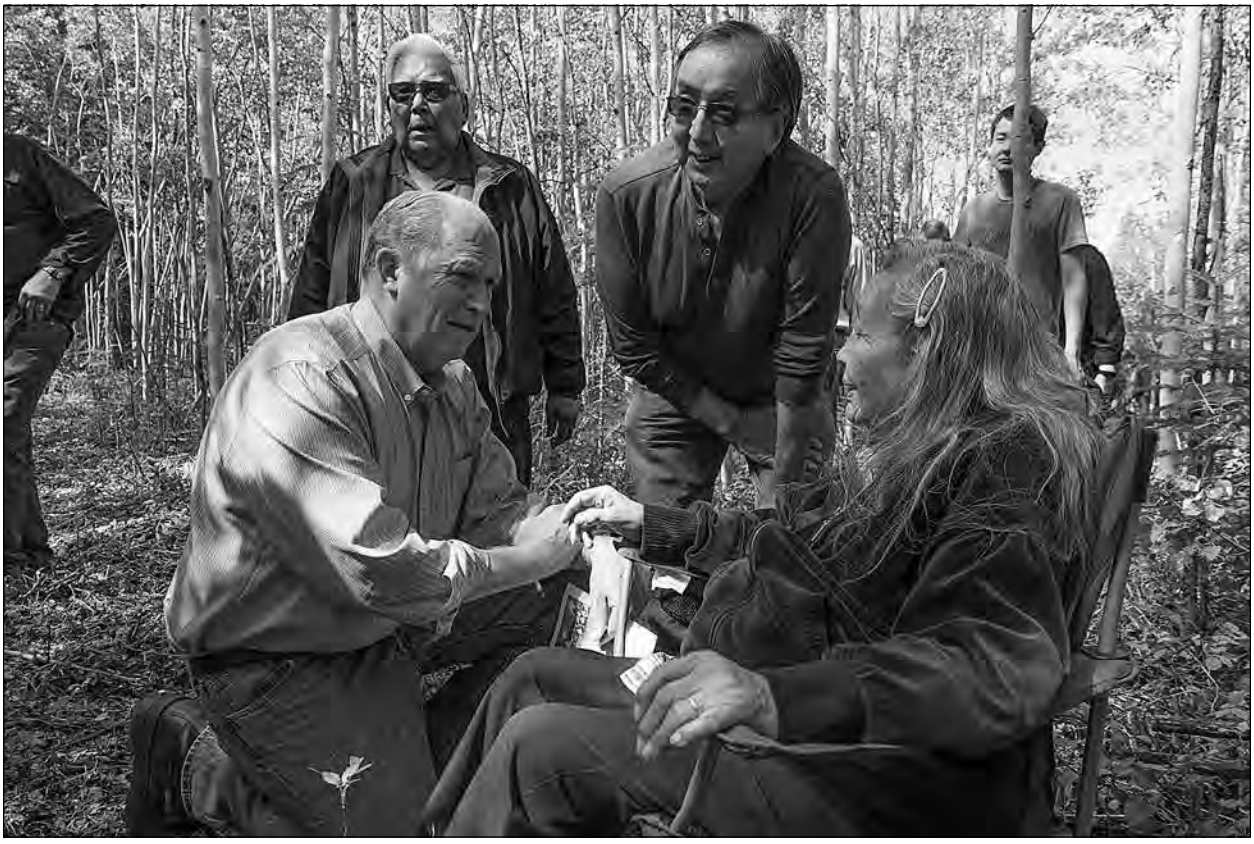


Figure 63: Governor Bill Walker visiting with the Ahtna in Gulkana about land ownership, 2017. Alaska State Archives, Office of the Governor, ASA_A1_RG348_SR612_0206_GOAVID04_160630_Event_GOA_Gulkana-Visit-Tour_Gulkana-P1130153.

Because of the state's failure to comply with ANILCA's rural priority, the Federal Subsistence Board (FSB), which was established to manage subsistence harvests of rural residents, passed temporary fishing regulations mirroring those established by the state. John petitioned the FSB to undo these regulations, but in a surprising move, the FSB concluded that Tanada Creek and the Copper River were navigable waters, and therefore not subject to ANILCA because they were not under federal jurisdiction. John and Charles challenged this decision, maintaining that by not taking over management of subsistence fisheries on navigable waters, the federal government was not fulfilling its obligation to manage subsistence uses on federal lands. In March 1994, a federal district court ruled in favor of John and Charles: the federal government did indeed have the authority to manage subsistence fisheries on navigable waters. The State of Alaska appealed the decision, but in April 1995 the ruling was upheld. The state made one more attempt to revisit the decision, but this failed.

As it wound through the legal system, the Katie John case, as it became known, was a rallying point for Alaska Native subsistence rights. Protest marches in support of Katie John and Doris Charles in Anchorage attracted thousands of demonstrators, including civil rights icon Rosa Parks. In one of these rallies, John stated she was fighting for subsistence users and she wanted to put things back the way they were before the state began issuing hunting and fishing licenses. "I don't want nobody telling you better have a piece of paper. I don't want that…" (Hulen 2016). John's and Charles's victory forced fisheries managers to open a fishery at Batzulnetas, but their success had wider ramifications. It pushed the federal government into assuming a more active role in the management of subsistence fisheries and expanded its jurisdiction to include fishing on more than half of Alaska's navigable waters.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Colonialism refers to the practice of one nation acquiring political control over another nation, conquering its population, and forcing its own language and cultural values upon the colonized population. While Russian colonialism had little effect on the Ahtna, the impacts of American colonialism, rooted in the conviction of national superiority and a duty to shape the lives of peoples perceived as lesser, were devastating. The newcomers built roads and towns and cleared tracts of land for agriculture and mining. These physical changes opened the Ahtna homeland to settlement and commerce based on a capitalist model of individual enterprise and private property. The presence of a majority nonnative population altered the social environment so that Ahtna became a minority in their own land. Nonnatives assumed control of the land, the government, and education. They instituted regulations and undertook enterprises that threatened the very basis of Native life. Not only did nonnatives bring new ways of doing, but also new ways of being. They instilled doubt in Ahtna about their very existence as a people by introducing Christianity and western ideas based on the strict separation of humans from their environment, along with values championing individualism over community needs. In the end, Ahtna could not escape and were forced to alter their lives to accommodate the nonnative presence.

Competition over resources created antagonism between Natives and nonnatives that is still apparent in the debate over subsistence. For Ahtna, living from the land is not only economic, but an integral part of their cultural heritage and contemporary way of life. In undermining the seasonal way of life, colonialism threatened the very basis of Native life. Ahtna resisted, using the legal system and tools learned in the wider world, including from boarding schools and other Native people. The Alaska Native Brotherhood provided Ahtna with the tools to build a unified and disciplined front from which to confront this threat to their culture and wellbeing as a people.

The effect of Christianity was more nuanced. Ahtna, like many groups of Dene, were interested in Christianity, often combining Christian beliefs with Dene spirituality. Ahtna had limited contact with Russian Orthodoxy but accepted it for a variety of reasons, including enhancing business relations with Russian traders and fending off the effects of smallpox and other diseases that Ahtna doctors were unable to treat. As a result, by the end of the nineteenth century many Ahtna considered themselves Russian Orthodox. The ability of the Church to maintain a presence in the Copper Basin was undermined by the increased American presence as well as the Russian Revolution of 1917 (Znamenski 2003). This vacuum was filled by American missionaries such as Vincent Joy who worked on a personal level, offering spiritual guidance in confronting serious problems, especially alcohol. But the missionaries also brought confusion. People who had lived in one world, in one environment, with one culture were told that their way of being, of living, was at best invalid, and at worst, devil worship or evil. Nevertheless, today many Ahtna consider themselves devout Christians.

By the 1950s most Ahtna resided in permanent communities, adjusting to a very different way of life and rapidly becoming the minority population in their homeland. Mandatory school attendance, competition from nonnatives, and a changing economy brought an end to the seasonal way of life. Passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 injected new life into Ahtna communities, although this landmark legislation was a double-edged sword. People now had a land base and other resources, but along with it came a western corporate structure that conflicted with some Native values. But Ahtna are a resilient and adaptable people and have used traditional cultural values to successfully adjust to the changing world.

CHAPTER 8: AHTNA HABITATION AND USE OF LANDS WITHIN WRANGELL-ST. ELIAS NATIONAL PARK AND PRESERVE

Ahtna traditional territory encompasses a vast majority of the lands within Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve (see Map 1, Chapter 2, Introduction; and Map 2, Chapter 7, "It Was Ours All Along"). As colonialism impinged on their traditional way of life and Ahtna became sedentary, their use of the land changed. As a result, their presence in what has become Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve also changed. While contemporary Ahtna use less of their traditional homeland on a consistent basis, there is real danger in assuming these lands hold no significance. Although use of the lands within the present-day park may not be as intensive or widespread as it once was, many Ahtna still express a strong sense of connection to the places inhabited by their ancestors. Mentasta resident Eva John discussed this sense of connection at length in a 1988 interview:

> [...] 'Cause you feel for the land and the animals, you have a strong feeling inside you, it's so hard to describe. Like these lands, you know, um, we never go out there all the time but, we see 'em in our mind. We see these places that where we been, where our parents took us all the way up to Twin Lake my dad took us, my, one time he took us sheep hunting up there, I can still see them, you know, the country and just the way it makes you feel so good. You feel free and you feel like, you know, you're somebody when you're out there, because you identify with the land and the animals. So it is important to our, the way we feel inside of us. [...]
>
> It's like, uh, you know your ancestors, you know, roam these countries, your people lived off the land and to you it's what they handed down to you, you know, they've brought down, you know, these thing to us and it's been handed down from them to our parents and to us and myself I you know, I pass whatever I know on to my kids and I let them work with their grandchildren, I mean their grandparents. [...]
>
> […] when I look out and look at the mountains and stuff and it makes me want, you know think of long time ago when my grandparent and them you know, roamed, they didn't have cars and stuff, but, I bet they roamed all these mountains and stuff and got the gophers off you know, the mountain right here in Mentasta. And you know, I know they use a lot of those lands, it does mean a lot to me. [...]
>
> I know you can, I think it comes from the heart and I don't think the people don't feel from their heart how other people feel, I don't think they can see it like a native person. 'Cause we feel from our heart, for our country, our people, our animals, so yes I think there's a difference that nonnatives don't feel the same way that we do about our land and our subsistence way of life. There are some that do though, you know I met a few (John 1988).

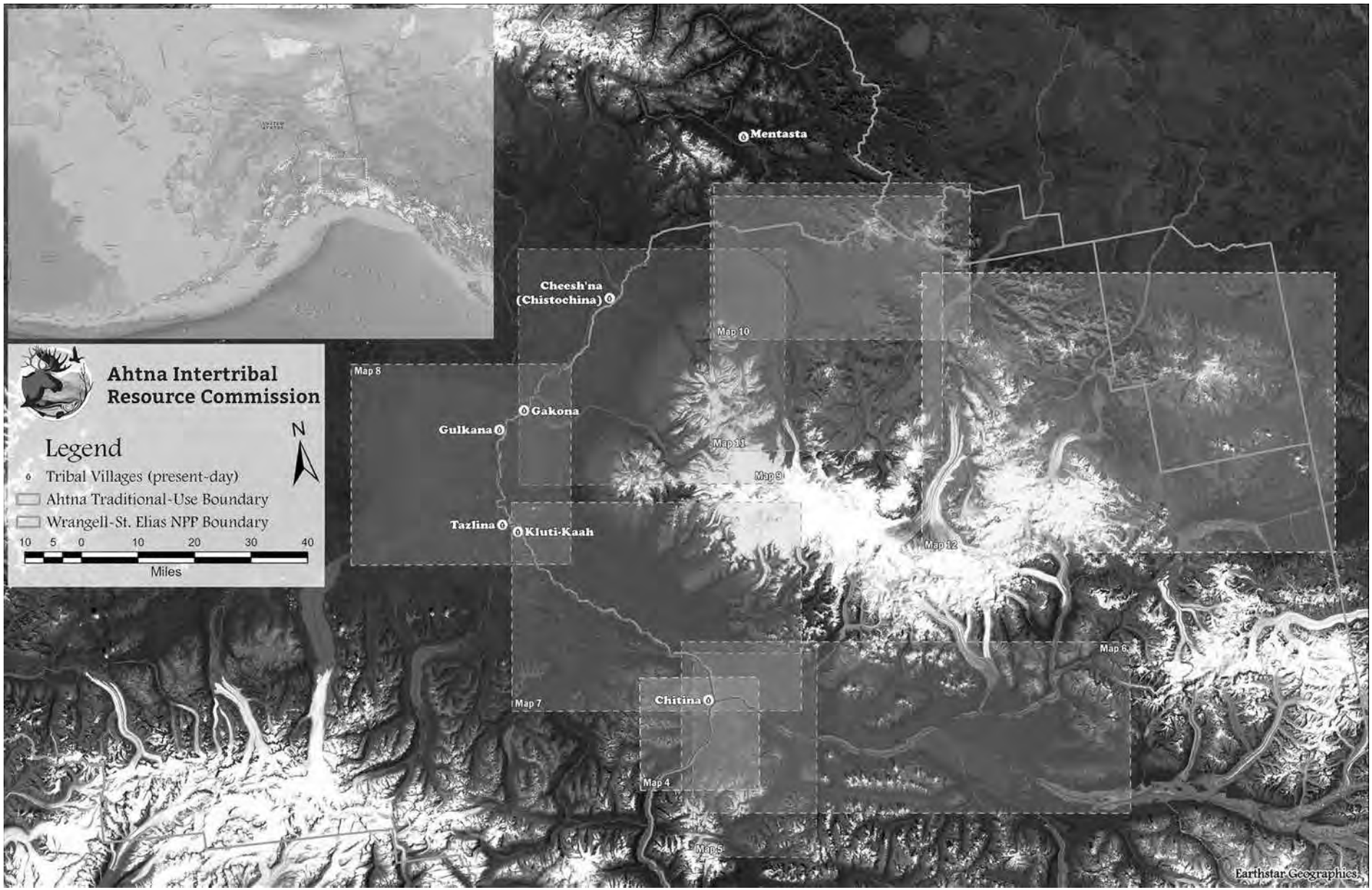
Wilson Justin (quoted in Ainsworth 1999, 43) explains that land is not just a physical space, like a street address, but an "idea," an "area" integral to a people's identity and existence. It is a "nourishing terrain," a place that gives and receives—a place not only lived in but lived with (Rose 1996, 7). Anthropologist Tom Thornton (2011, 8) identified four cultural elements fundamental to Indigenous ideas of place: social organization, language, material production, and ritual processes. Writing about Tlingit, Frederica de Laguna (quoted in Thornton 2011, 14) said "…it would be possible to show that an

individual's sense of history and geography is strongly affected by the dominance of the sib [clan or house group] which controls the social, political, and ceremonial aspects of his or her life. […] It is the clan that provides a sort of unity to geography and history…." De Laguna (quoted in Thornton 2011, 37) further remarked that "Tlingit territory at its most fundamental level is conceptualized not in terms of large swaths of land but as a constellation of points of locales."

Previous chapters in this report have attempted to convey this Indigenous conceptual framework, describing Ahtna relationships to the land. Chapter 3 portrayed Ahtna strategies for making a living on a subarctic landscape in which food sources are relatively scarce. Doing this required coordinated patterns of seasonal movement through which Ahtna obtained far-flung sources of food and material, many of which were only available during short windows of time. Because subarctic animals and plants often fluctuate dramatically in abundance and location, Ahtna families and bands needed to strategize about how to maximize their chances of meeting their needs in an uncertain environment. However, their decisions were guided not by the calculating, disembodied logic of western fish and game management systems, but by the network of nonhuman persons that inhabited their living landscapes and held them accountable to *ʾengii* prescriptions (Chapters 4 and 5). Ahtna land tenure and territoriality was a system in which clans and families had clearly established rights to specific territories within the Ahtna homeland (Chapter 2). These were the land bases in which each group located their main settlements and from which they obtained their primary sustenance. Chapter 2 also outlines major political and geographic features for each of the four major groupings of Ahtna (Upper Ahtna, Lower Ahtna, Central Ahtna, and Western Ahtna). Indigenous notions of geography and territoriality were interwoven with all aspects of Ahtna life, including their understanding of cosmology and their place in the world. Ahtna place names conveyed important geographic information to travelers, while the structure of the language itself reflects centuries of lived experience in the Copper River basin and vicinity. But as the Euro-American colonial project ramped up during the twentieth century (Chapter 7), western notions of "private property" disrupted Ahtna relationships with their homelands, as did the droves of outsiders who began pouring into the Ahtna homeland.

While this chapter relies heavily on the concepts of Ahtna land use introduced in Chapter 2 and elsewhere, it serves a different purpose. Chapters 2 through 7 sought to portray Ahtna culture as it existed and developed from the late nineteenth century into modern times. Chapter 8 is concerned with cataloging Ahtna settlements and important use areas in and near Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. As in previous chapters, this is a synthesis of previously recorded data. Publications such as Reckord's (1983b) *Where Raven Stood: Cultural Resources of the Ahtna Region*, West's (1973) *Inventory of Trails and Habitation Sites in the Ahtna Region*, and Simeone's (2014) *Along the Ałsʾeʾtnaey-Nalʾcine Trail: Historical Narratives, Historical Places* form the backbone of this inventory. Kari's most recent (2014) version of *Ahtna Place Names Lists* has been an invaluable geographic and linguistic reference. Unless otherwise noted, place name spellings and translations listed here are in accordance with this source. In addition to published sources, we have made considerable use of archival data, especially the fieldnotes of de Laguna and McClellan (1954, 1958, 1960) and de Laguna and Guédon (1968). While collecting new data on present-day use of the park is certainly a worthwhile endeavor, Ahtna use of the park today is not nearly as intensive or geographically widespread as it was before the mid-twentieth century. Most of the culture-bearers who had detailed knowledge of these past habitation patterns are no longer alive. For this reason, combing archival sources may be the best way to prevent some of this historical-geographic knowledge from being lost forever. We hope this chapter provides a start, but also anticipate that more archival sources on this topic will be unearthed.

With this in mind, the very nature of this inventory effort comes with limitations. As Chapter 2 indicated, Ahtna land-use patterns were dynamic. Seasonal movement was ubiquitous prior to the twentieth century, and movement patterns sometimes varied from year to year, or from decade to decade, based on factors such where the caribou were migrating. Ahtna culture was adapted to the dynamic nature of the landscape and the human and nonhuman populations that inhabited it. Describing Ahtna habitation



Map 3: Locations of individual maps shown in this chapter. Map created by Casey Cusick, AITRC.

and use areas as a set of discrete points and lines may create an artificially static impression of how these lands were used. At its worst, there is a danger that inventory could reify a specific set of sites while creating the impression that other areas were not used. Perhaps other areas were used longer ago or were simply not as well-remembered. Unfortunately, it is difficult to convey dynamic patterns of movement across the landscape while still providing detailed, systematic information about each site. Perhaps there are ways of doing this that could be applied in future projects. Certainly, many Ahtna have shared stories and travel narratives (see, for example, Kari 1986) that better capture this dynamic sense of movement within Ahtna territory. Some of these are quoted below, and elsewhere in this report.

The rest of this chapter contains an inventory of Ahtna habitation sites (and other significant features) in and adjacent to Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. These sites are presented in ascending order relative to the Copper River. In other words, sites lowest on the river are presented first, followed by sites farther upriver. (The end of this chapter also includes sites in the Nabesna, Chisana and White river drainages.) Each site is numbered so that it can be easily located on the corresponding map. Finally, each of the broader subsections within this chapter correspond with a map showing the numbered sites within that subsection.

COPPER RIVER: HALEY CREEK–CHITINA RIVER

Map 4 shows sites 1–5, located within the Lower Ahtna region.

Site 1: *Tats'abaelghi'aa* (A Spruce Extends into the Water)

Tats'abaelghi'aa was a village located on the east bank of the Copper River somewhere opposite the mouth of Haley Creek (Kari 2014, 8). Reckord (1983b, 95), citing de Laguna (n.d., 3) said *Tats'abaelghi'aa* was located at Mile 119 on the Copper River and Northwestern Railway – on the east bank of the Copper River and south of Haley Creek. This place was the home of *Tats'abaelghi'aa Ghaxen* ("Person of Spruce Extends into the Water"). According to the Ahtna elder Jim McKinley (2010, 3), this is the last place the Ahtna occupied downstream of Chitina on the Copper River.

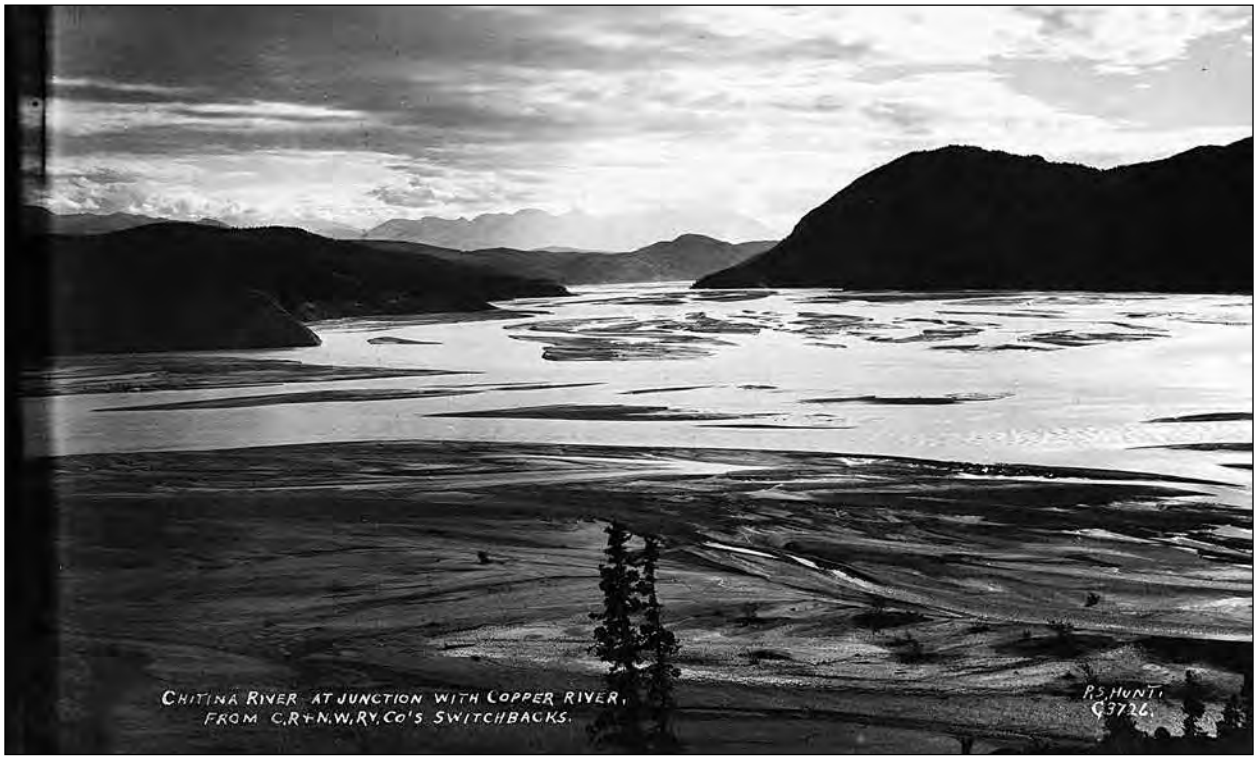
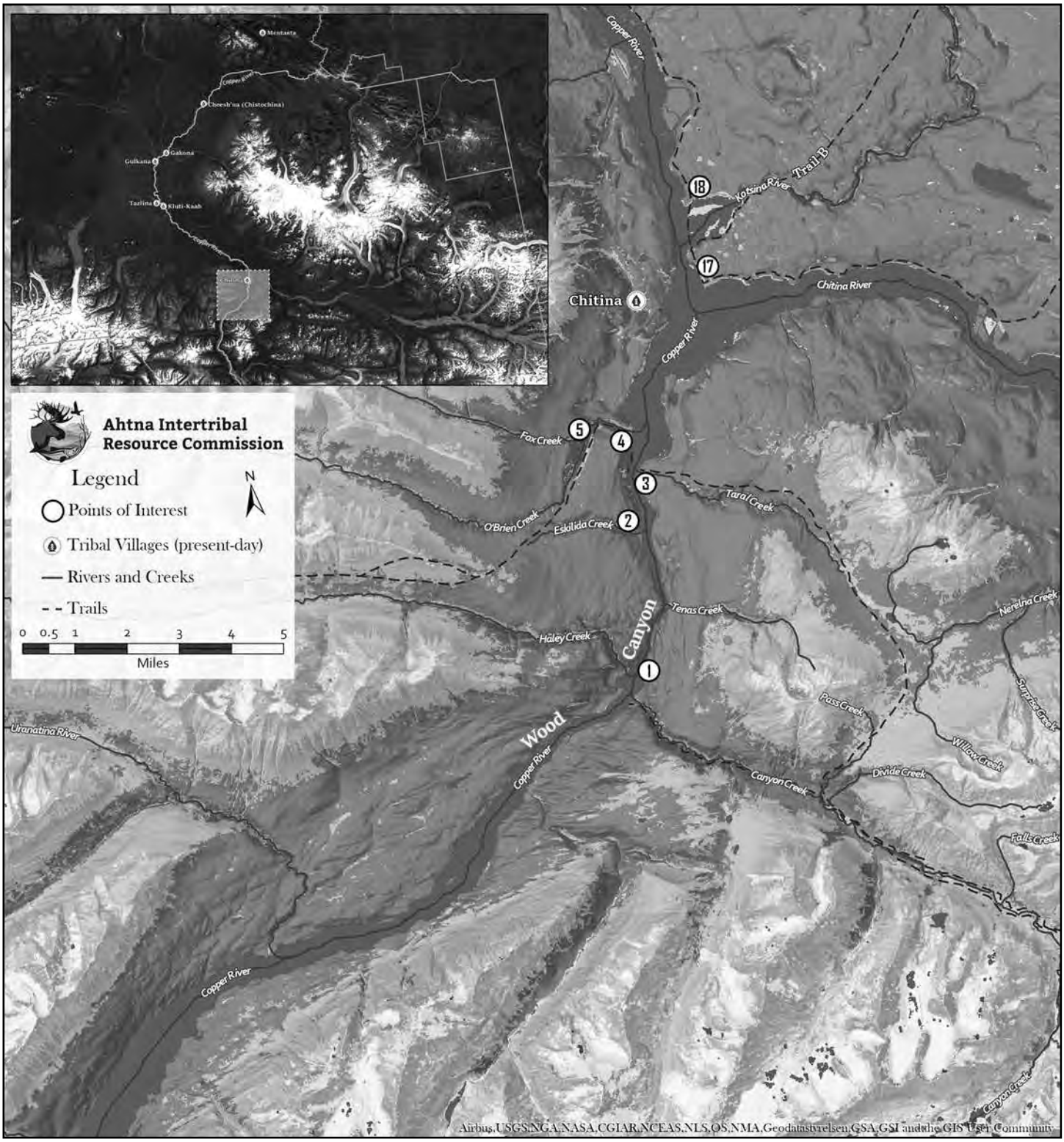


Figure 64: Chitina River at junction with Copper River. Alaska State Library, Wickersham State Historic Sites Photo Collection, P277-008-137.



Map 4: Approximate locations of Ahtna habitation sites in the Copper River valley between Haley Creek and the Chitina River. Map created by Casey Cusick, AITRC.

Figure 65: Chief Goodlataw at his home about one mile above Taral, 1898. F. C. Schrader Collection, U.S. Geological Survey.

Site 2: *Tsenłte' Cae'e* (? mouth)
Located at the mouth of Eskilida Creek just above Wood Canyon, *Tsenłte' Cae'e* (Kari 2014, 9), was Chief Eskilida's fish camp.

Site 3: *Taghaelden* (barrier in water creek), also known as Taral
Taghaelden (Kari 2014, 9), or Taral, was home to *Taghael Denen* ("Person of Barrier Water"). Taral is a significant historical site. Nicolai, an important Ahtna leader, is associated with the site, as are several prominent Ahtna families such as the Goodlataws. In the spring of 1885, Lt. Allen (1887, 49) described Taral as having two houses, one a winter house, the other an unoccupied summer house. About one-and-a-half miles away was a spruce bough tepee used by several women and children. A trace of the "Russian odinátschka" (trading post) was visible, as was part of a "huge Greek Catholic cross." According to Jim McKinley, Taral was inhabited at various times of the year and was a fish camp that belonged to Nicolai's wife (Reckord 1983b, 98).

Site 4: *'Usdi Cae'e* (farthest ahead creek)
A village that is located at the mouth of O'Brien Creek, *'Usdi Cae'e* (Kari 2014, 9) was home to *Ts'es K'e Denen* ("Person of on the Rock").

Site 5: *Hwt'aa Cae'e* (enclosed mouth)
Hwt'aa Cae'e (Kari 2014, 9) was associated with the inherited chief's title *Dakah Den'in* (Shinkwin 1979). It was located at the mouth of Fox Creek, was home to *Hwt'aa Cae'e Denen* ("Person of Beneath the Mountains"). West (1973, 9) says the village is "larger than any known historically or ethnographically with nine house pits and several underground caches."

LOWER CHITINA RIVER

Map 5 shows sites 6–11, located within the Lower Ahtna region.

Site 6: *Staghael Na'* (?off bundled stream), also known as Strelna
Staghael Na (Kari 2014, 10) is located on the north side of the lower Chitina River drainage, on a tributary of the Kuskulana River (Strelna Creek). The site seems to have been occupied at various times in the past and may have been a fish camp as well as winter settlement. When the Copper River and Northwestern Railway was built, it was said that Chief Eskilida transferred his residence from Tebay village to Strelna. Later on, a mining camp was also located here. The geologists Moffit and Mertie (1923, 18) wrote that the Ahtna who lived at Taral had moved to Strelna, and that most of the men were employed on the railroad, as waiters, guides, or unskilled labor. Ahtna from the Tebay area came to Strelna to pick berries in the late summer. After Eskilida died in 1927, the site was used seasonally as a hunting and trapping camp. Rena Jacomet, who was born at Chitina in the early twentieth century, said that her grandfather and his family hunted at Strelna in the springtime. They killed sheep and picked berries, then they moved over to the Tebay River, which Rena called their "hometown."

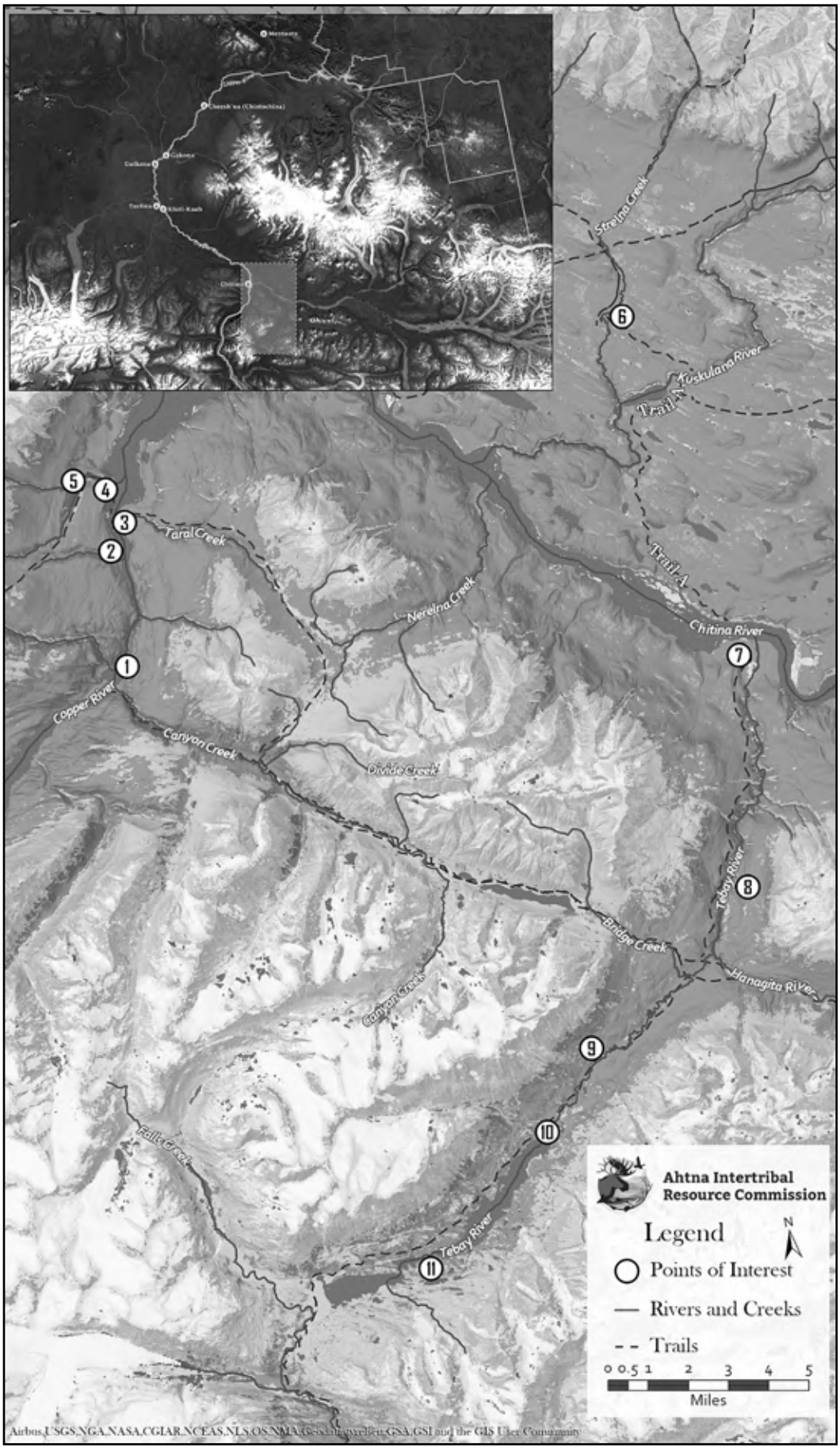
Site 7: *U'eł Sc'eldii Ta' Ak'ae* (home of father shoots with arrow)
U'eł Sc'eldii Ta' Ak'ae is located at the mouth of the Tebay River (Kari 2014, 11), and was a location where Chief Eskilida had a camp. From this site a trail ran across the Chitina River to Strelna (Trail A on the map).

Site 8: *Naghael Na'* (?down bundled stream), also known as the Tebay River

Site 9: *Naghic'et'I Ak'ae* (place where it hangs down)
Naghic'et'I Ak'ae was located farther upstream on the Tebay River (Kari 2014, 11, Reckord 1983b, 106). Sites 8 and 9 may both have been trapping camps belonging to Eskilida. At one of the sites there was a large structure that was a potlatch house, or large cabin that would accommodate a large number of people. Ahtna elder Frank Billum (1992a) said that Upper Tanana people from Northway walked over Skolai Pass to the Chitina River and Tebay Village to attend a potlatch. Walter Northway, who was the chief of Northway Village, told Billum he had come over Skolai Pass to the village at Tebay Lake for a potlatch, and Charlie James of Tanacross told Billum he had followed the same trail. Rena Jacomet said her grandfather and uncles trapped and stayed on the Tebay River all winter. In the summer, they moved to the Copper River to fish.

Site 10: *Xay Luugge' Bene' K'eseh* (Silver Salmon Lake Outlet)
Located at the outlet of Tebay Lakes (see Site 11, below), *Xay Luugge' Bene' K'eseh* (Kari 2014, 12) included a fish weir used to catch coho salmon, lake trout, and probably steelhead. Fishing occurred in the late summer and early fall and again in the winter when people fished through the ice for lake trout. Coho were not dried and cached under the ground like sockeye, but instead eaten fresh, slightly dried, or frozen. Oral history collected from Ahtna elders associates the Tebay area with Chief Eskilida, but use of the area certainly predates him (Pratt 1998). The Ahtna say this was an important village and many people used to live there.

Site 11: *Xay Luugge' Bene'* (Silver Salmon Lake), also known as Tebay Lakes
The lakes of *Xay Luugge' Bene'* (Kari 2014, 12) have runs of coho salmon and steelhead. In the fall, people fished for these, picked berries, and hunted sheep in the area. The last time Rena Jacomet remembered fishing at Tebay was in 1918 and the last time that her family went there to hunt sheep was about 1927, when her grandfather died. When she was young, they fished on the Copper River near the Chitina Bridge. She said "they just hunt sheep at Tebay – there are no moose."



Map 5: Approximate locations of Ahtna habitation sites in the lower Chitina River valley. Map created by Casey Cusick, AITRC.

UPPER CHITINA RIVER

Map 6 shows sites 12 – 16, located within the Lower Ahtna region.

Site 12: *C'elaxi Na'* (spawning creek), also known as the Lakina River
C'elaxi Na' (Kari 2014, 13) had a sockeye fishery whose importance was attested in both written and oral histories. Local people maintained that Crystal Creek and the Lakina drainage was one of the best spawning grounds in the Chitina Basin (Thompson 1964, 25). The Lakina is part of a drainage system flowing out of Long Lake on the north side of the Chitina River. Reportedly "several tons" of dried salmon were prepared at Long Lake in 1914 (Thompson 1964, 36).

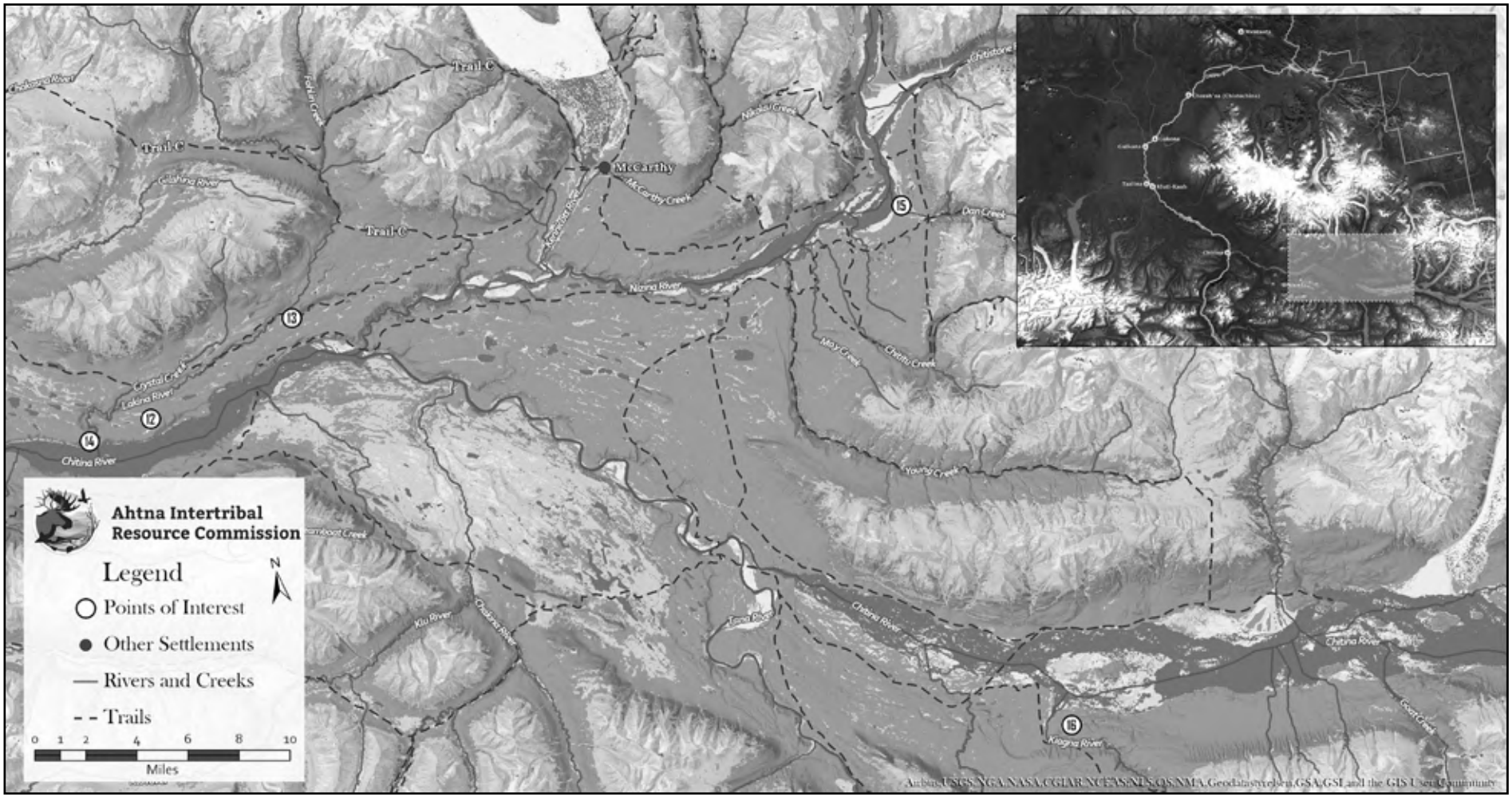
Site 13: *C'elaxden* (spawning place), also known as the outlet of Long Lake
C'elaxden (Kari 2014, 13) was an important fishing site and the only place in the Chitina River drainage with an associated chief's title (see Chapter 4) – *C'elax Denen* or "Person of Fish Run Place" – indicating its importance and age. According to Jim McKinley, this was the chief closest to the source of Native copper and the one most directly responsible for its distribution (Reckord 1983b, 107).

Site 14: *C'elaxi Cae'e* (Spawning Creek place mouth), also known as the mouth of Lakina River
C'elaxi Cae'e (Kari 2014, 13) was the site of a fish camp. Rohn (1900, 797) reported a salmon cache a short distance from the mouth of the Lakina River, and Ahtna elder Etta Bell (1995) said that McKinley John used to have a fish camp on the Lakina River. Both Ahtna elders Frank Billum and Maggie Eskilida (1992) said there was a "big village" at the mouth of the Lakina River and during hard times people congregated there to take advantage of the salmon run. Taral residents used the place during times of starvation to intercept salmon going up the Lakina. If, for some reason, the salmon harvest on the Copper River was poor, the Lakina runs provided a fallback because they ran late into the year.

Site 15: *Tsedi Ts'ese' Cae'e* (copper stone mouth), also known as Nicolai's camp
Considerable uncertainty has surrounded the exact location of *Tsedi Ts'ese' Cae'e*, Chief Nicolai's copper camp. The camp is located in the Nizina River drainage.[1] Kari (2014, 13) and Reckord (1983b, 108; who cites personal communication with Kari as her source for this information) locate the camp at the mouth of the Chitistone River. But Vanderlugt (2022) recently asserted, based on primary source research, that *Tsedi Ts'ese' Cae'e* was located a few miles from this confluence, at the mouth of Dan Creek.[2] Vanderlugt's conclusion comports with Pratt's (1998, 88) earlier work. (West 1973, 4, also located the site at the mouth of Dan Creek, but did not specify a source for this).

Lieutenant Allen (1887, 54–55) described *Tsedi Ts'ese' Cae* as Nicolai's primary winter residence. This was the location where Allen's party visited the famous *denae* after several Ahtna guided them into the upper Chitina valley. Unfortunately, Allen's official report provides very few direct observations of the place, characterizing it as a sheep-hunting camp with several caches in the vicinity. While Allen was there, his party and the Ahtna subsisted on sheep, moose, beaver, lynx and rabbit. In 1891, Charles Hayes (1892, 144) traveled over Skolai Pass and down through the Nizina valley, but did not observe the site. Hayes said that Nicolai and his group were fishing in Taral by that point in the season.

[1]The river that is today called the Nizina River on official USGS maps was referred to by Allen (1887) as the "Chittystone River." In contemporary, official use, the Chitistone River refers to a tributary of the upper Nizina River. See Vanderlugt (2022, 227-228) for a detailed consideration of the place names, and maps, from the Allen expedition.
[2]Kari (2014) and others have associated the name *Tsedi Ts'ese' Cae'e* with the mouth of *Tsedi Ts'ese' Na'*, or the Chitistone River (Kari 2014, 13). Based on Kari's work, Vanderlugt (2023) has said that villages bearing the names of river mouths are not always located at the exact points denoted by these place names. Additionally, Ahtna villages were sometimes relocated by distances of up to several miles while retaining the same names. Although Vanderlugt (2022) has argued that Nicolai's village site is located at the mouth of Dan Creek, he chose to retain the name *Tsedi Ts'ese' Cae'e* in reference to it, after Pratt (1998) and other scholars who have written about the site. Dan Creek, itself, does not have any known Ahtna name associated with it (Vanderlugt 2022, 233).



Map 6: Approximate locations of Ahtna habitation sites in the upper Chitina River valley. Map created by Casey Cusick, AITRC.

Vanderlugt (2022, 216–250) has pointed out that as the only known village in the Nizina basin, a location with "some of the richest surface copper deposits in the world," *Tsedi Ts'ese' Cae'e* was in an extremely important position within the regional copper trade. Additionally, the village sat at the confluence of two major travel routes leaving the Chitina River valley – one over Chitistone Pass to the upper Tanana valley, and one over Skolai Pass to the White River valley. Pratt (1998, 89) has characterized the site as "critical to the maintenance of the lower Ahtna position in the Native copper trade."

Site 16: *Kayaxi Na'* (Village Creek), also known as the Kiagna River
Kayaxi Na' (Kari 2014, 14) is a river in the upper Chitina drainage, and the site of "Kiagna Village," which was located near its confluence with the Chitina River. Billum (1992, quoted in Pratt 1998, 89) described the site as Nicolai's "headquarters."

Information on *Kayaxi Na'* is sparser, even, than that on *Tsedi Ts'ese' Cae'e*. There are no known accounts of explorers who directly visited the site, or other mentions of it in early literature on the Ahtna (Pratt 1998, 89). Sources such as de Laguna (1970), West (1973) and Reckord (1983b) do not note the site at all. However, it has long been known in Ahtna oral tradition and has been documented in elder interviews such as Billum (1992), and Billum and Eskilida (1992).

Kiagna Village was located along a travel route leading from the Chitina River valley over the Bagley Icefield to Cape Yakataga (see Chapter 2, Ahtna Territories and Territoriality, Lower Ahtna), giving it strategic importance in the regional copper trade (Pratt 1998, 89). It is possible that Nicolai may have died and been buried at this site, according to Pratt (1998, 92).

COPPER RIVER: CHITINA RIVER–KLUTINA RIVER

Map 7 shows sites 17–33, located within the Lower Ahtna region.

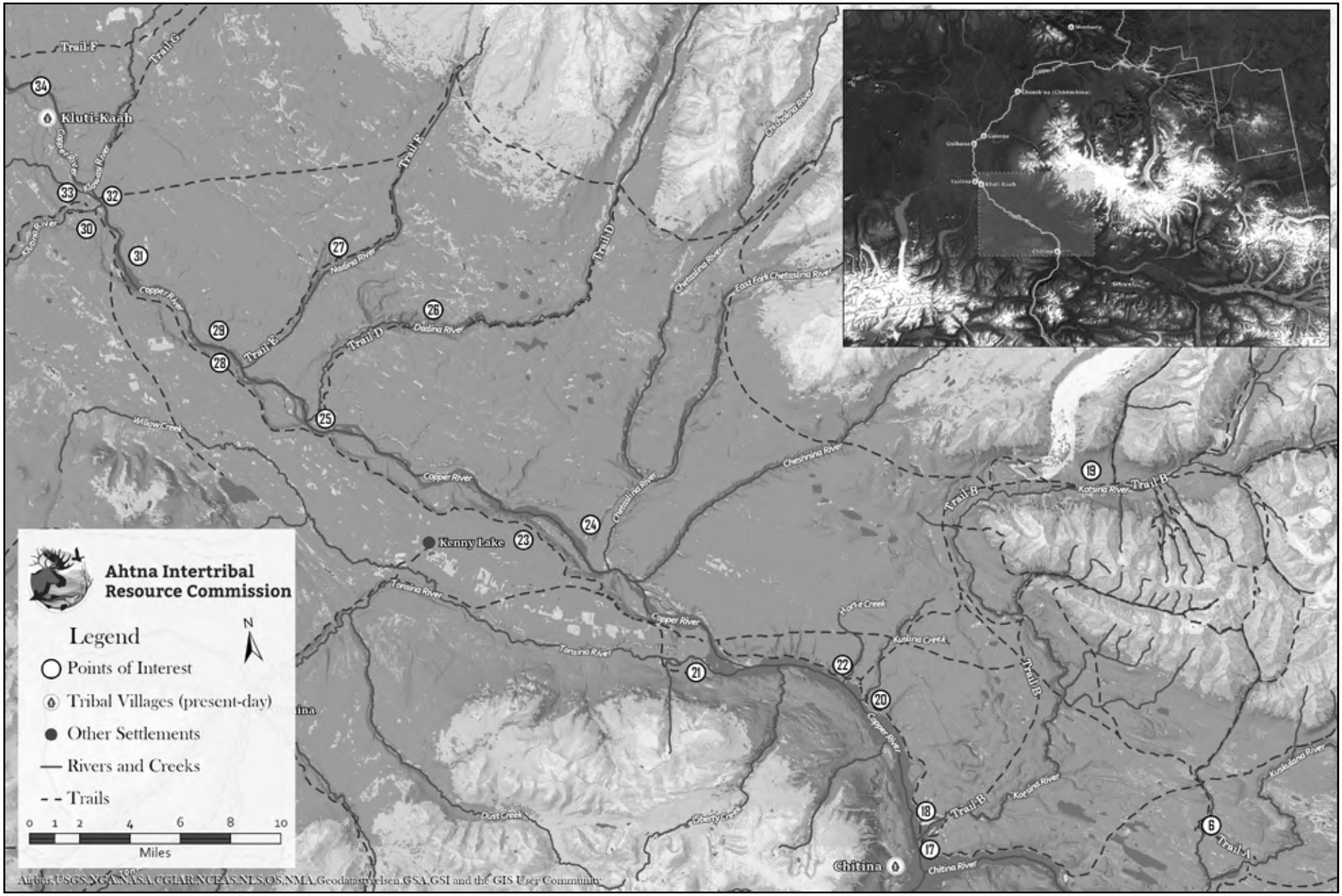
Site 17: *Tsengha* (?by the odor)
Tsengha (Kari 2014, 15) was Eskilida's village, located at the foot of the Copper River and Northwestern Railway bridge across the Copper River (Reckord 1983b, 113).

Site 18: *K'a'si Cae'e* (cold mouth), also known as the Kotsina River mouth
K'a'si Cae'e (Kari 2014, 16) was the location of a fish camp (Reckord 1983b, 113).

Site 19: *K'a'si Na'* (cold river), also known as the Kotsina River
The uplands of the *K'a'si Na'* (Kari 2014, 16) drainage were a hunting area used by Lower Ahtna, including Douglas Billum (see Chapter 3). According to Walya Hobson, people from Tonsina and elsewhere had hunting grounds at the headwaters of the Kotsina River, which they used during the fall months. Prospectors also used the headwaters in the early twentieth century, building cabins in the area; a wagon trail went up the length of the Kotsina (Trail B; Reckord 1983b, 114). Douglas Billum inherited hunting grounds in the upper Kotsina from his father's nephew, Kotsina Jack, after he died (de Laguna and McClellan 1958, Box 6.2, 9.9.58).

Douglas Billum recalled a sheep hunt that took place when he was about ten years old. After putting up seventy bales of salmon, he went hunting with his father, stepmother, brother, Kotsina Jack and his wife, and Suzie and Harry King. Crossing the Copper River in a birch-bark boat, they walked up the Kotsina River, shooting spruce hens on the way and eating lots of berries. Three of the party went up into the mountains to hunt sheep. They killed one and ate the liver immediately. They then packed the meat and guts back to the hunting camp where everyone ate sheep ribs roasted over a fire. Then they went to the Kennicott Trail (Trail C, shown in Map 6, Sites 34–44) and crossed a bridge to the Kennicott Glacier.[3]

[3]Douglas Billum was reportedly a young boy at the time of Lt. Allen's 1885 expedition (de Laguna and McClellan 1958, Box 6.2, 7.28.58), so the sheep hunt he describes here presumably would have taken place during the late 1800s. Accordingly, the bridge described here would not have been associated with the Kennecott Mine or the associated Copper River and Northwestern Railway.



Map 7: Approximate locations of Ahtna habitation sites in the Copper River valley between the Chitina River and the Klutina River. Map created by Casey Cusick, AITRC.

Figure 66: Chitina from Town Lake, July 13, 1954. Alaska State Library, Frederica de Laguna Photo Collection, P350-54-9-34.

There they made a house, drying racks, and a fire. They found a sheep lick and put three people on each side of the lick. When the sheep came down, Billum scared them down to Kotsina Jack. Three of the party had guns. They killed fifty-one sheep and floated them across the Kuskulana River, tying ropes to them. They ate three sheep and dried all of the others, cutting the meat into thin strips and smoking it on racks that were similar to fish racks. Each sheep yielded fifty strips of meat. They cooked the bones and roasted the heads by putting sticks through them (de Laguna and McClellan 1958, Box 6.2, 9.9.58).

Site 20: *Tay'sdlaexden* (fish run stream or where fish run up)
Tay'sdlaexden (Kari 2014, 18) was the location of an old village at the mouth of Kuslina Creek that was occupied until 1928 (Reckord 1983b, 115). According to John Billum, this creek is the one that locals call "Horse Creek," as opposed to the one just north. (The village just north is the one local people call *Skostle Na'* or Rabbit Creek, but it is labeled "Horse Creek" on USGS maps.) Lt. Allen (1887, 58) described meeting an old *denae* named Messála who lived there, apparently Chief Bacille according to de Laguna. Most of the residents of this settlement were members of the *Dits'i'iltsiine* clan, although Bacille himself was *Naltsiine* (Reckord 1983b, 115). Allen wrote that Messála had been chief of the Lower Ahtna but had been replaced due to "infirmity" by Conaguánta and Nicolai. Allen also wrote that Messála had led the Ahtna in one of the "Russian massacres" and for this reason feared Allen had come to seek revenge.

Site 21: *Sdates* (peninsula pass)
Located on a point below Lower Tonsina, *Sdates* (Kari 2014, 20) was known as Doc Billum's crossing, where he ran a ferry across the Copper River during the gold rush days and early 1900s (Reckord (1983b, 116). West reports that Walya Hobson's grandfather had a spruce-bark house and a log cabin there. At the time, *Sdates* was the main village along the east bank on this reach of Copper River, but the site has been

Figure 67: Doc Billum's crossing at *Sdates*. Guy F. Cameron Collection, UAF-1983-209-131, Archives, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

completely washed away. Elsewhere, Hobson said the site was a fish camp (West 1973, 12). (Perhaps this was the case more recently, after most families had moved their permanent dwellings across to the west side of the river.) Hobson, whose father had a fishwheel at *Sdates*, describes the fisheries there:

> When they lived across the river they used to fish right there. Across the river from Lower Tonsina, that's where my grandparents used to fish. All the villages were along the river and right near the creek. You have to have the water nearby because people don't have a well; you have to have way to get water so that is why they don't have to have [separate] fish camp. Just fish right in your own village. […]
>
> ...they start fish wheel when the Whiteman came. He showed them, so everybody running fish wheel those days. So my mother and father, brother, and sister stay across the river until the fish dried. And there, there was a place, a ferry, I don't think they have Indian name for that place. My grandfather start the ferry. Lower Tonsina, *Ts'es 'ungga*, across from there (quoted in Simeone et al. 2007, 111).

Site 22: *Tats'esghi'aaden* (where a rock is in the water), also known as Wintercourt
Tats'esghi'aaden (Kari 2014, 20) was located on the east bank of the Copper River above Horse Creek. Walya Hobson said, "I think Horse Creek is *Tats'esghi'aaden*. I think that's what call it. 'Stone stick out to the water,' what it means. They used to fish, you know dipnet by that stone sticking out, jutting out. They stand on that, with dipnet. That's what it means" (quoted in West 1973).

Site 23: *Bes Cene* (base of the riverbank), also known as Liebestag, Riverstack, Riverstag and Liverstack
Bes Cene (Kari 2014, 20) was located on the west bank of the Copper River near present-day Kenny Lake (Reckord 1983b, 129). Lt. Allen called the village chief or *denae* by the name "Liebigstag."[4] The inherited chief's title associated with this place is *Bes Cene Denen* ("Person of Riverbank Flat").

Regarding *Bes Cene*, Robert Marshall (2005) told a story about being sent to fetch water in a nearby canyon or gully when he was a boy and discovering a bunch of human skulls.

> Long time ago, Liverstack there was a canyon there. We used to bring water there coming out of the ground. My grandpa said before his days there was a war there between Russia and Athabascan. The Russians came down with a raft and boat. They stake out for them there and kill them before they go Chitina, stop them there.
>
> How that story started was when us kids, mom told us go down there and get spring water. In our native way we called it brain water, why they said that is cause, in that canyon when they killed the Russians they were dumped in the canyon. When we was kids we went down there to get the water, we dug around the water we found a skull. I brought one back home to mom. Mom said, "Don't bother it, take it back." So we took it back, and told us the story of how they used to have war and when they killed a Russian they threw them down the canyon.

Figure 68: Ahtna hut opposite the Chetaslina River. Copper River region, Alaska; July 19, 1900. Walter C. Mendenhall Collection, U.S. Geological Survey.

Site 24: *Sdaghaayden* (along the point or end of the point)
Sdaghaayden (Kari 2014, 22) was located on a flat, grassy point on the mainstem of the Copper River, just above the mouth of the Chetaslina River (Reckord 1983b, 131). This place had an inherited chief's title (*Sdaghaay Denen* or "Person of End of the Point") and in the nineteenth century the title apparently belonged to Chief Liebigstag, with whom Lt. Allen stayed. Reckord (1983b, 113) thinks this may have been the fish camp that people at Riverstag (site 23) used. West (1973, 15) reports that this village comprised

[4]Allen (1887) spells the name Liebigstag. But Kari (2014) gives the name as Liebestag village.

Figure 69: Fishwheel operating on the Copper River, gull flying above it, Chistochina, July 22, 1968. Alaska State Library, Frederica de Laguna Photo Collection, P350-68-5-19.

three winter houses. She quotes de Laguna (n.d.) in saying that this village was below a hill, and that Nicolai was chief, followed later by *Sdaghaay Denen*, the chief associated with *Sdaghaayden*. Based on Lt. Allen's report (1885, 58) and maps, de Laguna and McClellan surmise that Liebigstag's village was on the east bank of the Copper, near a stream that drained the north side of Mt. Wrangell. They suspect that Chief Liebigstag may have been Tenas Charley's father, who lived at *Sdaghaayden*. Douglas and Mary Anne Billum told de Laguna and McClellan (1958, Box 6.2, 7.28.58) that there was a "really good chief" at *Sdaghaayden*, and also mentioned that Chief Nicolai stayed there.

After Mary Anne Billum's paternal grandfather and great-grandfather died at *Sdaghaayden,* her mother came down from Chistochina with her parents for the potlatch. While there, Mary Anne's great uncle (Tenas Charley's father) requested that her mother stay behind and said that he would find her a husband.

According to Andy Brown and a woman identified as "Grandma" McKinley, Grandma McKinley's grandfather was *Tsedi Kulaen Denen*, the maternal uncle of the chief at *Sdaghaayden*. Her father, Chief Stickwan, lived with his dad at "Chetaslina," in a traditional spruce-bark house during his youth. Later on, he moved to *Nic'akuni'aaden* (Site 28; de Laguna and McClellan 1958, Box 6.1, 7.25.58).

Elsewhere, Grandma McKinley says of her father: "Yes, he was a lawyer. Everybody scare [of him]. He was good talker. When he gets mad everybody fraid [*sic*]" (de Laguna and McClellan 1958, Box 6.1, 7.25.58). In discussing the area around the village where her father lived as a young boy (called "Chetaslina" in their notes), some of her comments indicate that it may have been a village is just upriver from *Sdaghaayden*: "It's right close to the creek, this side of [*Sdaghaayden*]…That big flat place is [*Sdaghaayden*], right close to the creek. […] [*Sdaghaayden*] – used to be good looking place – big, flat. […] good looking place like a big farm."

According to de Laguna and McClellan, Grandma McKinley clearly stated that her father lived at or near the Copper River – not upriver where the two forks of the river converge: "Right on the river his camp.

Two way channel." She said that one could go up the Dadina River from this area: "Lots of house, she say. Lots of people. Them days not the same as now. Live in [*nitsiił*]. [*Nitsiił*] means a lot of people. Maybe 3 [*nitsiił*] in one village, maybe 2 [to] 3 hundred people" (de Laguna and McClellan, 1958, Box 6.1, 7.22.58).

Site 25: *Tsedi Kulaenden* (where copper exists), also known as Copper Village

Tsedi Kulaenden (Kari 2014, 23) was located on the east bank of the Copper River below the mouth of the Dadina River (Reckord 1983b, 132). The inherited chief's title *Tsedi Kulaen Denen*, or "Person of Copper Exists Place," is associated with this site. Bacille George said this was an important area for processing and distributing copper. The original *Tsedi Kulaen Denen* was a member of the *Naltsiine* clan. He is said to have found copper four miles up the Dadina River. He became the richest man in the Copper River area (de Laguna and McClellan 1954, Box 5.2, 7.26.54).

Bacille George described to de Laguna and McClellan some of the history of *Tsedi Kulaenden,* including his family history,

> At [*Tsedi Kulaenden*], 4 miles below the Dadina River, my dad used to live there. Used to have fish camp there […] They strike copper in the bank there – big copper. One rich man come in there, lived there, long time ago before white people. He find the copper. He was called [*Tsedi Kulaen Denen*][…] Chief, like president. He found the copper. He was [*naltsiine*] man (de Laguna and McClellan 1954, Box 5.2, 7.25.54)

In the fieldnotes from an interview, de Laguna and McClellan (1960, Box 7.1, 7.8.60) conducted with Nancy George, Tenas Charley, and Bacille George, *Tsedi Kulaen Denen* is described as having been very rich:

> The biggest rich man in Copper River is Tsedi Kulaen Denen. He's the richest man in Alaska. He don't work, never work. He and his wife, they never work. Just like the president. His wife got somebody take care of them, somebody cook, everything. She walk some place, don't have to carry nothing. What that woman want [somebody get for her].

Site 26: *Hwdaadi Na'* (downriver river), also known as the Dadina River and Site 27: *Hwniidi Na'* (upriver river), also known as the Nadina River

Hwdaadi Na' and *Hwniidi Na'* (Kari 2014, 23) were hunting and trapping areas used in the nineteenth century by Ahtna living on the east bank of the Copper River. In the twentieth century the area was used by Ahtna living in Copper Center.

Tenas Jack told Jack Campbell (1971) that residents of the *Hwniidi Na'* area used hunting territories that were entirely on the east side of the river. Jack said there was no need to cross the Copper River. They used two different hunting routes on the slopes of Mt. Drum – one followed the Sanford River, and the other followed the Dadina River (Trail D). People from this village hunted sheep on "both sides" of Mt. Drum and "up to the glacier." They used the Nadina River drainage as well. They generally began hunting in August, at the end of the fishing season, and hunted sheep for about a month. Sometimes they remained in the highlands through the winter trapping season. Village locals said they killed four to six moose each year around the Dadina drainage. Jack remembered seeing a moose fence up the Dadina River (Campbell 1971, 19). They did not rely much on caribou, which were not abundant in the Mt. Drum area (Campbell 1971, 78).

According to Jack and Tony Jackson, families from the Copper Center area hunted in the Nadina River drainage, and there were trails that they used to access the area for sheep hunting (Trail E; Campbell 1971). Chief Andrew, who lived in *Tay'laxi Na'* across from Copper Center, trapped up the Nadina and Dadina rivers (Campbell 1971; Reckord 1983b, 136–137). In a 2017 interview, Jean George told Barbara Cellarius that her father, Tenas Jack, had a trapping cabin on the Nadina in the 1920s and 1930s. George described travelling with her father to the cabin by dog team, spending the winter there while he trapped, then returning to Copper Center in the spring with a sled full of furs.

Figure 70: The community of Copper Center, seen from a terrace to the west, September 6, 1958. Alaska State Library, Frederica de Laguna Photo Collection, P350-58-6-29.

Site 28: *Nic'akuni'aaden* (where area extends out from shore)
Nic'akuni'aaden (Kari 2014, 24) was a village located on the west bank of the Copper River one mile above the Nadina River. Reckord (1987b, 134) thinks this was the home of Conaguánta, an Ahtna leader described by Lt. Allen (1887). When Allen visited, he counted twenty-three men, eight women, and sixteen children. This place also had an inherited chief's title *Nic'akuni'aaden Denen*.

Site 29: *Xay Hwnax* (Winter house)
Xay Hwnax (Kari 2014, 25) is a site on the east bank of the Copper River above *Nic'akuni'aaden* (Reckord 1983b, 135). According to Reckord (1983b, 135) this village belonged to a *denae* variously called Stickwan, Stickman, or Stephen, who later moved to *T'aghes Tah* or Wood Camp.

Site 30: *T'aghes Tah* (among the cottonwoods), also known as Wood Camp
T'aghes Tah (Kari 2014, 25) is located on the west bank of the Copper River below the mouth of the Klutina River (Reckord 1983b, 135). There was a village there that remained occupied into the twentieth century. It is now a fish camp. Chief Stickwan lived there until he died in 1907 (West 1973). Jim McKinley said that cottonwoods extended out to the shore there and at the end of the cottonwood grove was a village (Kari 1986, 45).

Site 31: *Nige' Kulaenden* (where silverberries exist)
Nige' Kulaenden (Kari 2014, 25) was located about five miles below Copper Center on the east bank of the Copper River. It is believed to have belonged to Tanana Jack (Reckord 1983b, 135).

Site 32: *Tay'laxi Na'* (fish run creek)
Tay'laxi Na' (Kari 2014, 25) was the name of a creek whose mouth was located across from, and half a mile below, the mouth of the Klutina River. A village was found at this location (Reckord 1983b, 136). Tanana Jack, who lived on top of a hill at this location, traveled with Lt. Allen in 1885. Tanana Jack was a *denae* and a *kaskae*, esteemed for settling a conflict with Mentasta. One of Tanana Jack's sons, Chief Andrew, used to trap up the Dadina and Nadina rivers. This enabled him to make a lot of money, and he eventually became a well-known *denae* (Reckord 1983b, 136–137). Tanana Jack and his family lived on a hill above the rest of the settlement (West 1973, 18), but after he died the family moved down to the riverbank. His sons also included Copper Center Pete and Copper Center John (Reckord 1983b, 36–37).

Site 33: *Tl'aticae'e* (rear water), also known as Copper Center village
Tl'aticae'e (Kari 2014, 30) is located on the west side of the Copper River, just north of the mouth of the Klutina River. There are many historical references to people from the Copper Center area – whether from the village site itself or from the surrounding area – using the lands east of the Copper River. In a 1993 interview, Morrie Secondchief reported that in the old days, some Copper Center locals would begin hunting around mid-July, as salmon fishing activities began to die down. They would cross the Copper River to the Wrangell Mountains. Old man [Tenas] Jack used to tell Morrie, "Let's go, let's go, fish dry already." They would hunt for sheep on the flank of the mountain, drying it and using pack dogs to transport it back home (Secondchief 1993).

COPPER RIVER: KLUTINA RIVER–TULSONA CREEK

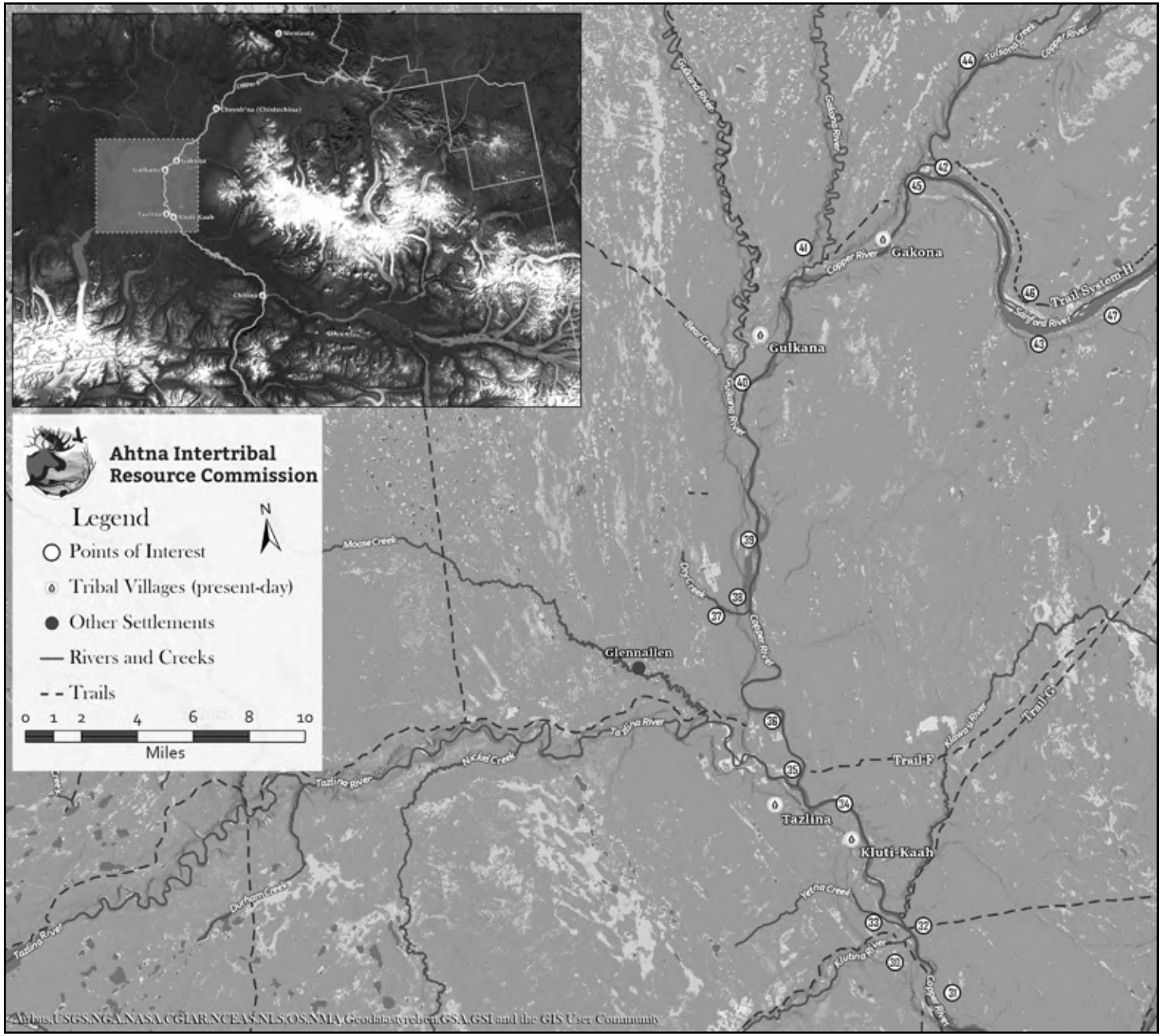
Map 8 shows sites 34–44, located within the Central Ahtna region.

Site 34: *Nay'dliisdini'aade* (where songs extend across)
Nay'dliisdini'aade (Kari 2014, 37) was a village located on both sides of the Copper River near Silver Springs (Reckord 1983b, 150). Both locales shared the name *Nay'dliisdini'aade*, which referred to the fact that people singing on one side of the river could be heard on the other. There is a bend in the river at this location that is believed to have been the gravesite of a child who drowned in the river here. Traditionally, Ahtna have believed that rivers and streams move to avoid the sites where people have drowned. Reckord (1983b, 150) says that there are many stories associated with this location; it is thought to have been inhabited from ancient times.

Site 35: *Tezdlen Cae'e* (swift current mouth)
Tezdlen Cae'e was a village near the mouth of the Tazlina River, near present-day Tazlina village. *Tezdlen Cae'e* consisted of six houses large enough to hold twenty-five people (Kari 2014, 37; West 1973, 21).

In a 1968 interview with Frederica de Laguna and Marie-Françoise Guédon, Frank and Elsie Stickwan described some of the hunting territories used by people from *Nay'dliisdini'aade* and *Tezdlen Cae'e*:

> Stickwans: Next place is Tazlina River mouth [*Tezdlen Cae'e*]. Big village too. Villages on both sides, can hear singing other side [*Nay'dliisdini'aade*]. From *Tezdlen Cae'e* go to Tazlina Lake [*Bendiil Bene'*], some to Mt. Drum [*Hwdaandi K'ełt'aeni*] [Trail F]. Go up to salt water [warm spring]. They pass salt water, way up to Sanford River [*Ts'itaeł Na*] – up Sanford Mountain [*Hwniindi K'ełt'aeni*] [Trail G].
>
> Interviewer: Doesn't that belong to people up the line?



Map 8: Approximate locations of Ahtna habitation sites in the Copper River valley between the Klutina River and Tulsona Creek. Map created by Casey Cusick, AITRC.

> Stickwans: Yes, they come together. They go up there. Andy Brown tell story about it. He tell story.
>
> Interviewer: They come together for?
>
> Stickwans: Sheep, caribou. Copper Center [*Tl'aticae'e*] people go up to Sanford River and Sanford Mountain. Chief Ewan go to Ewan Lake to hunt. Go around Ewan Lake. Go other side of Tangle Lake [*Ten 'Aax Bene'*] (de Laguna and Guédon 1968, Box 8.3, 8.17.68).

Site 36: *Sday'dinaesi gha* (by long point)
Sday'dinaesi gha was a village on the west bank of the Copper River (Kari 2014, 54). The authors of this manuscript were unable to locate any information about this community.

Site 37: *Latsibese' Cae'e* (hand head bank mouth), also known as Dry Creek village
Located in the vicinity of the Gulkana Airport (Kari 2014, 55), *Latsibese' Cae'e* was an important village and fishing site. West (1973, 22–23) reported two or three winter houses at this location. In 1939, the US Army occupied *Latsibese' Cae'e* and forced the inhabitants to move (see Chapter 7, "World War II: Government Destruction of Ahtna Village Sites"). From *Latsibese' Cae'e* there were trails to Ewan Lake, Crosswind Lake, and Tyone Lake.

Site 38: *Tatsengha* (by smelly water)
Tatsengha was a village about one mile above the mouth of Dry Creek (Kari 2014, 55). There is some confusion as to the location of this place, West (1973, 23) said it was located near the mouth of the Gulkana River and the "smell" referred to water from Bear Creek. De Laguna (n.d., 23) put *Tatsengha* below the mouth of Bear Creek and says this was the home of the famous chief *Cuuy*.

Site 39: *T'ahwdighi'aaden* (where the place extends below)
T'ahwdighi'aaden (where the place extends below) is a fish camp located on the Copper River below the mouth of the Gulkana River near the Gulkana Airport (Kari 2014, 56). Fred Ewan (2002) reported a fish camp located at Six Mile near the Gulkana Airport at the north end of the runway. In a peak year his family harvested seventy-five bales of sockeye and twenty bales of Chinook salmon. Fish camps were located all along the river near the Gulkana Airport. The Ahtna traded fish for other kinds of groceries and sold fish for cash to the Alaska Road Commission and the store. Fred Ewan told the history of the fish camp near the airport:

> Many people raised right here. Chief Ewan, my grandpa, Roy Ewan's daddy, Tenas Jack's mother, some more other people. Gakona Joe's daddy. Lots of people raised right here. My daddy raised here, and we [his siblings] raised around here too.
>
> There used to be a cache down here. We had a pole cache. We had it way out a half mile down by the river. That river was way over there back then [the channel has moved from one bank to another]. Where the trees are by the hill over there. It's been coming this way for a long time. Good fishing here. Right here is the best place for fishing. You can get all you want. Sometimes hundred a night with dip net. We used to dip them out with nets we made from tree roots and a long pole. The net hole was only a couple feet across, not like the ones they use today. They were really strong. Sometimes we catch two at a time. Women and boys netted them. We put some rope around them in case they fell in. That's the way they should do at Chitina. So many drown there.

Figure 71: Ahtna near Gakona. circa 1902. Walter C. Mendenhall Collection, U.S. Geological Survey

> We survived good. Better than anything. We had fish racks here for drying salmon. We never get tired of it. We make 70 bales of fish one night. Seventy times forty-two [2,940] one summer. I remember that why we made big cache. A high one too. Maybe twenty, twenty-five feet high so bears wouldn't get in. We used ladder made from a big tree we notched all the way up so we could get in (quoted in Smelcer 1997, 31–32).

Site 40: *Cuuy Ak'ae* (least weasel's home)
Cuuy Ak'ae was below the mouth of Bear Creek on the Gulkana River (Kari 2014, 57). Some Ahtna elders have reportedly suggested that the Bear Creek site is one of the oldest fishing sites known. Archaeological excavations have revealed extensive cache pits used for storing salmon on the hills above Bear Creek (Workman 1977).

Site 41: *Tazanuu' Tah* (among islands in clear area), also known as old Gakona village
Tazanuu' Tah was located below Five Mile Hill (Kari 2014, 85) – a hill located at approximately Mile 5 on the modern Tok Cutoff Highway. West (1973, 24–25) reported that the archaeologist Froelich Rainey found a recently abandoned village at the mouth of *Ggax Kuna*' (Rabbit River) or the Gakona River, but the village had been washed away. West (1973, 25) placed *Tazanuu' Tah* on the west side of the Copper River above the mouth of the Gakona River and was told this was "a very big old village."

Site 42: *Ciisi K'aet* (dip net hole)
Ciisi K'aet (dip net hole) was a fish camp located above the mouth of the Sanford River (Kari 2014, 87). This was an important fishing site used by both Ahtna and nonnative fishermen. Katie John recalled how her father, Charley Sanford, built a platform in the Copper River and used a dip net to catch salmon. Because high water frequently washed out the platform, Charley Sanford moved upriver to Tanada Creek (Simeone 2014).

Site 43: *Ts'itaeł Na'* (flows straight river), also known as the Sanford River
Ts'itaeł Na' (Kari 2014, 85) was an important hunting area for Ahtna (refer to Map 8). Most, if not all, of the creeks in the Sanford River drainage have Ahtna place names attesting to continual use. The Sanford River uplands were important for caribou and sheep hunting, and there were traplines around some of the lakes in the area, which Reckord (1983b, 185) described as having been abandoned in the then-recent past. West (1973, 25) noted a village called Nachina (*Natii Na'*), located 12 miles up Sanford River. Adam Sanford said of the Sanford River area:

> "My home. I born west side [sic] of Copper River, at Sanford River mouth. My grandpa, mother, daddy, uncle – all lived there. Chief Nicolai,[5] my mother's real brother, was [*kaskae*]. He was *'Ałts'ę'tnaey*. Boulder Creek [to the north] and Sanford River were *'Ałts'ę'tnaey*" (de Laguna and McClellan 1958, Box 6.4, 8.12–14.58).

Figure 72: Kate and Adam Sanford, close-up, Chistochina fish camp; July 21, 1968. Alaska State Library, Frederica de Laguna Photo Collection, P350-68-5-8.

[5]Here, Sanford is referring to a Chief Nicolai (sometimes called "Old Nicolai") who lived in the Slana area, not the Chief Nicolai from the Chitina River drainage discussed elsewhere in this report.

The area between the mouths of the Sanford and Indian rivers is rich in salmon, with nine different named salmon streams in the area (see Kari 1986).

Site 44: *Taltsogh Caegge* (yellow water mouth)
Taltsogh Caegge is the mouth of Tulsona Creek. Kari (2014, 88) reported a village at this location. According to de Laguna (n.d., 25), Chief Nicolai of Indian River lived at this village.

COPPER RIVER: SANFORD RIVER–BOULDER CREEK

Map 9 shows sites 45–58, located within the Upper Ahtna region, all of which are described as part of Adam Sanford's Travel Narrative. Jim Kari (1986, 91–128) published an extensive travel narrative by Adam Sanford describing an annual trip Sanford and his family made in late summer and fall to *Ts'itaeł Na' Ngge'* (flows straight river uplands) or the uplands at the head of the Sanford River below Mounts Sanford and Drum.

Site 45: *Ts'itaeł Cae'e* (flows straight mouth, straight wide mouth)
Ts'itaeł Cae'e was a village located at the mouth of the Sanford River (Kari 2014, 85). Adam Sanford's mother was from there, as was Charley Sanford, Katie John's father.

Site 46: *Ba'stadełi* (one we go up to)
Ba'stadełi is a creek flowing from the north into the Sanford River.

Site 47: *Natii Caegge* (?another creek mouth)
Natii Caegge is a creek flowing from the south into the Sanford River.

Site 48: *Natii Na' Ngge'* (?another creek uplands)
Natii Na' Ngge' is a creek originating from *Natii Na' Luu'* (?another creek glacier) that comes off Mt. Drum.

Site 49: *Tsaani Aeł Na'* (bear trap creek)
Tsaani Aeł Na' is a creek that flows from the north side of Mt. Drum.

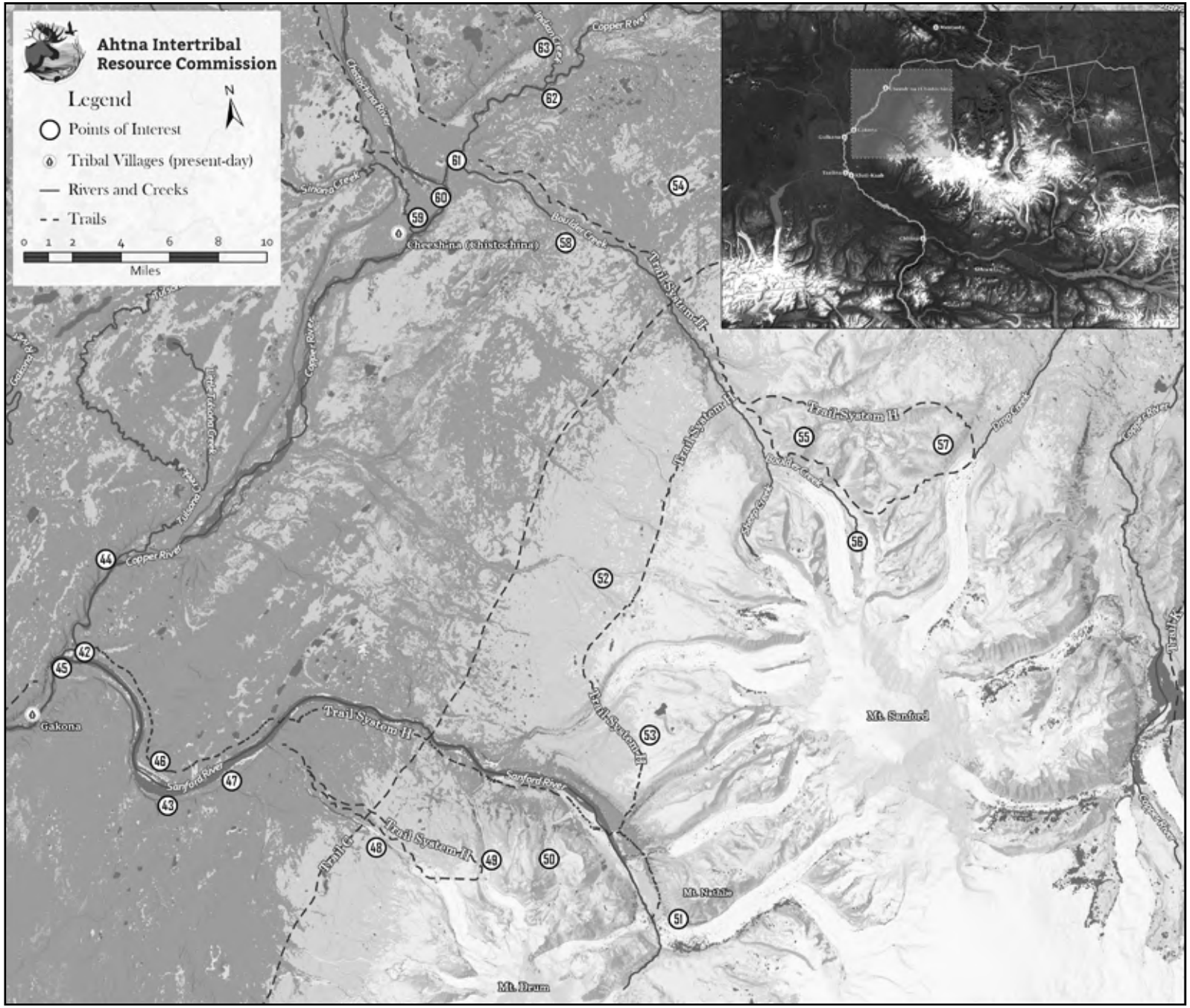
Site 50: *Una' Hwnelk'ezi Na'* (its creek is brown creek)
Una' Hwnelk'ezi Na' is a creek coming from the south into the Sanford River.

Site 51: *Kaghaa Na'* (up expanse stream)
Kaghaa Na' is another creek coming from the north below Mt. Nathlie.

Site 52: *Dit'ox Na'* (nest creek)
Dit'ox Na' is a creek from off the north side of Mt. Sanford. Sanford mentioned two places at the head of Nest Creek: *Dit'ox Tl'aa* (nest headwaters) and *Dit'ox Na' Luu'* (nest creek glacier). He commented that Nest Creek Glacier was large and only rams stayed up near the glacier.

Site 53: *Ben Tah* (among the lakes)
Ben Tah were lakes located north of the Sanford River.

Site 54: *Una'Tuu Koley Na'* (its creek has no water)
Una'Tuu Koley Na' is about one-half mile above *Sdzedi Na'* (opposite Indian River) where Adam and his family hunted for summer caribou.



Map 9: Approximate locations of Ahtna habitation sites in the Copper River valley between the Sanford River and Boulder Creek. Map created by Casey Cusick, AITRC.

Site 55: *Saas Dzeł* (sand mountain)
Saas Dzeł is a high point or ridge on upper Boulder Creek where they hunted ground squirrels.

Site 56: *Tsedghaazi Tl'aa* (rough rock headwaters)
Tsedghaazi Tl'aa is the Boulder Creek headwaters.

Site 57: *Kanteni Na'* (trail ascends creek), also known as Lonesome Creek
Kanteni Na' was located west of upper *Ts'oo Dzaay Na'* (brushy [parasitic] spruce creek) or Drop Creek. Sanford said there was a sheep lick off *Kanteni Na'*.

Site 58: *Tsedghaazi Na'* (rough rock creek), also known as Boulder Creek
Tsedghaazi Na' was the route along which Sanford and others returned, down the creek to its mouth.

COPPER RIVER: SINONA CREEK–INDIAN RIVER

Map 10 shows sites 59–63, located within the Upper Ahtna region.

While the present-day Chistochina village dates to the late nineteenth century, previous generations of Ahtna inhabited the surrounding area. De Laguna (n.d.) listed several settlements between the Sanford and Indian rivers.

Site 59: *Snuu Caegge* (brushy mouth), also known as the mouth of Sinona Creek
Snuu Caegge (Kari 2014, 90) was the site of a village.

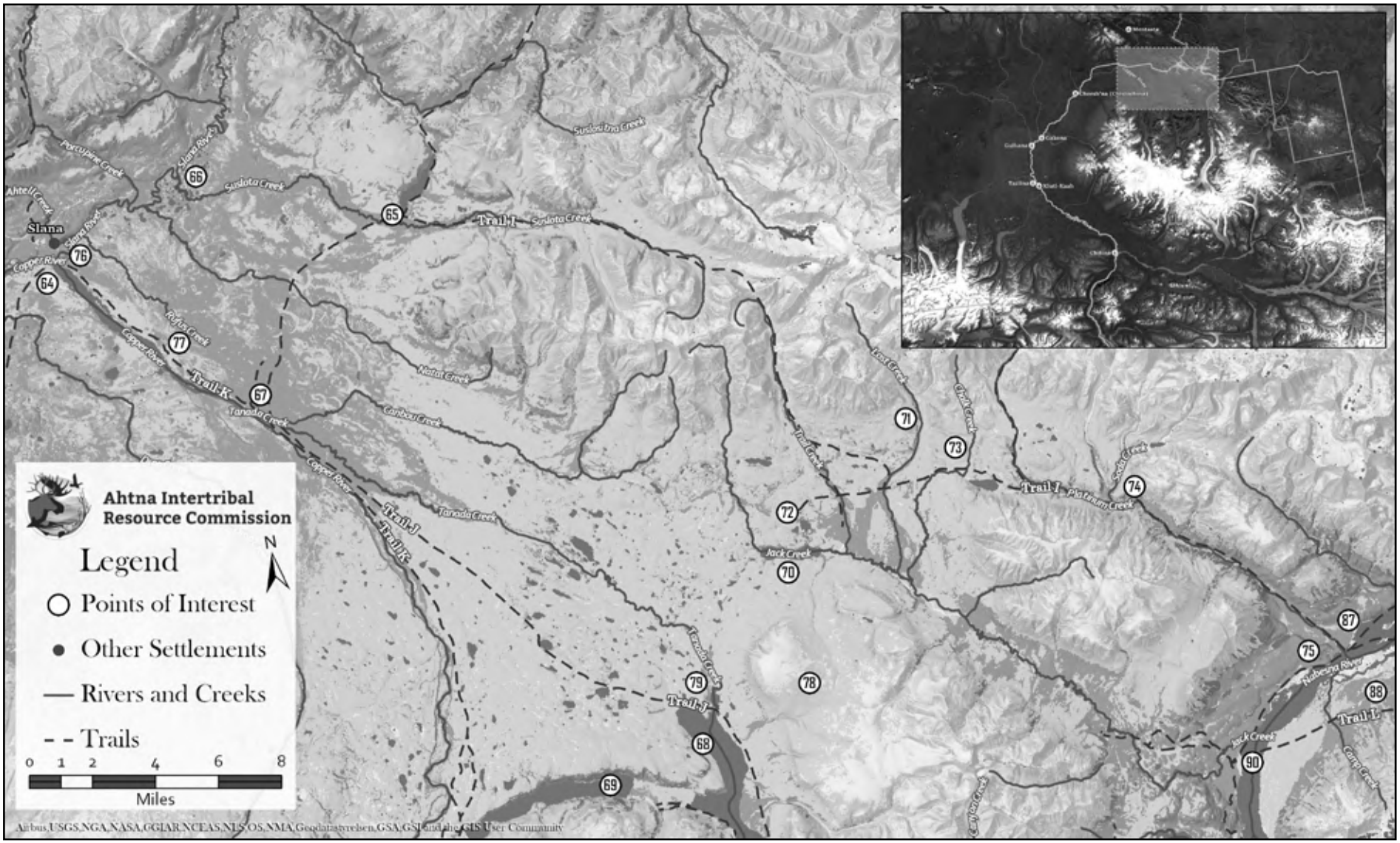
Site 60: *Tsitu' K'et* (on the main river)
Tsitu' K'et (Kari 2014, 90) was a fish camp on the Copper River near Chistochina.

Site 61: *Tsedghaazi Caegge* (rough rock mouth)
Tsedghaazi Caegge (Kari 2014, 93) is the mouth of Boulder Creek. Frank Charley had a fish camp at *Nił'axuni'aaden*, opposite the mouth of Boulder Creek. There were winter houses on the west bank of the Copper River above the mouth of the Chistochina River and another village or winter house at the mouth of Boulder Creek. According to de Laguna's informant, all of the land up Boulder Creek belonged to Chief Nicolai of Indian River (Simeone 2014).

Site 62: *Sdzedi Na'* (? event creek), also known as Caribou Creek
Sdzedi Na' is located opposite the mouth of Indian River (Kari 2014, 89). [The English name "Caribou Creek" is colloquial and unofficial, according to Reckord (1983b, 185).] This is the site of a village that was associated with the *Cela'yu* clan, according to Reckord (1983b, 185), based on de Laguna (n.d., 26). According to an elder interviewed by de Laguna, the settlement at Caribou Creek was on the east bank of the Copper River and had a run of Chinook salmon. According to Bell and Maggie Joe, caribou could be found in the vicinity of Caribou Creek throughout the winter, and migrating herds passed by attracting people from Gulkana and Copper Center. There were also moose in the region, as attested by a moose fence that was located here (Simeone 2014).

Adam Sanford said his grandfather, father, mother, and uncle all used to live at a small village at the mouth of Caribou Creek. Sanford described his family connections to the area:

> My mother's daddy sometimes he stay there [at Caribou Creek]
>
> Kate Sanford: That's where your mother raising.



Map 10: Approximate locations of Ahtna habitation sites in the Copper River valley between the Sinona River and the Indian River. Map created by Casey Cusick, AITRC.

> Adam Sanford: My mother raise there.
>
> Interviewer: Was your father [*denae*]?
>
> Adam Sanford: Yeah – [*denae*] […] Lots of villages across. I hear one village at Caribou Creek this side. […]. [Adam doesn't remember the name]. Another, 2 [to] 3 miles, another village – all this side" (de Laguna and McClellan 1958, Box 6-4, 8.12–14.58).

Site 63: *Di'idaedl Na'* (many [fish] go in river), also known as Indian River
Di'idaedl Na' (Kari 2014, 94) was the site of a village whose principal resident was Chief Nicolai (de Laguna n.d., 27–28). Indian River has a run of Chinook salmon.

COPPER RIVER: SLANA RIVER–COPPER HEADWATERS

Map 11 shows sites 64–75, located within the Upper Ahtna region (sometimes considered to be Upper Tanana borderlands).

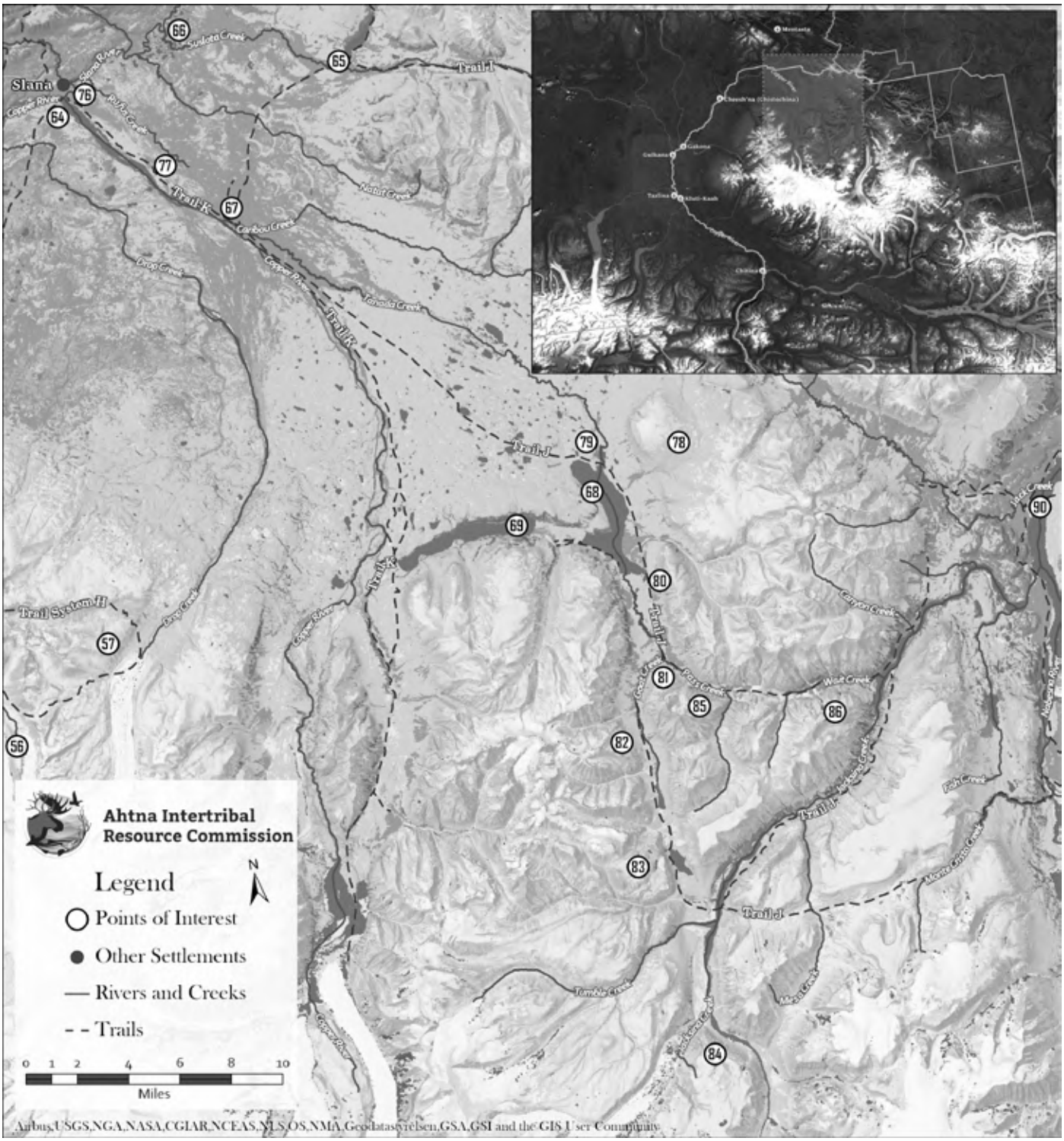
Site 64: *Stl'aa Caegge* (rear mouth), also known as Slana
Stl'aa Caegge was the site of a village located at the mouth of the Slana River (Reckord 1983b, 189). The archaeologist Froelich Rainey (1939, 361) excavated the site at *Stl'aa Caegge*, finding the remains of bark houses along with artifacts such as stone skin scrapers, bone combs, and beaver teeth used for carving wood.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Katie John's father, Charley Sanford, moved his family from *Ts'itaeł Cae'e* to the mouth of the Slana River. The family spent winters trapping around Slana, summers at Batzulnetas fishing for salmon in Tanada Creek, and the fall hunting in mountains above Tanada Lake. The village at *Stl'aa Caegge* as well as the surrounding lands were associated with the *'Ałts'e'tnaey* clan.

Site 65: *Sasluuggu'* (small sockeye salmon), or *Tes K'et* (on the hill), also known as Suslota
According to Reckord (1983b, 191), *Sasluuggu'* was a village that was located on the shore of Suslota Lake near its outlet. It was an important community because many of the residents of Chistochina and Mentasta, as well those of Tanacross and Tetlin, can trace their roots to *Sasluuggu'*. The village was also at the nexus of several important trails including trails north to the Tanana Valley and east to the Nabesna River (Trail I).

Site 66: *Sasluuguu' Caegge* or *Bes Ce'e* (big bank)
Sasluuguu' Caegge was a relatively recent village site, also called New Suslota, which was located at the confluence of Suslota Creek and the Slana River. Reckord (1983b, 196) reports that in 1906, villagers abandoned *Tes K'et* (Site 65, above) and moved downstream, partly to be closer to the Eagle telegraph line and road that had just been built. According to Reckord, the site was founded by Suslota John.

Site 67: *Nataełde* (roasted salmon place), also known as Batzulnetas
Nataełde (see Kari 2014, 108) is possibly the most famous historic site on the Copper River and appears on the map of central Alaska published by Ferdinand von Wrangell in 1839. Because of its location on Tanada Creek, *Nataełde* was the premier salmon fishing site on the upper Copper River, attracting Native people from a wide area. Up until the 1940s, many Upper Ahtna families fished at Batzulnetas during the summer, then moved to Tanada Lake and the Wrangell Mountains in August to hunt for Dall sheep and trap ground squirrels. Batzulnetas was also located at the intersection of several major trails and was an important stop on trade routes leading into and out of Upper Ahtna territory.



Map 11: Approximate locations of Ahtna/Upper Tanana habitation sites in the Copper River valley between the Slana River and the Copper River headwaters. Map created by Casey Cusick, AITRC.

Figure 73: Looking across Copper River country from Tazlina Hill, 1954. Alaska State Library, Frederica de Laguna Photo Collection, P350-54-10-26.

Batzulnetas, in fact, refers to three different localities: *Nataełde* (roasted salmon place), which refers to a specialty prepared by the men of the village (Reckord 1983b); *C'ecenn' gha* (by the stumps); and *C'ecaegge* (river mouth). Both *Nataełde* and *C'ecenn' gha* are located on Tanada Creek, while *C'ecaegge* is located on the Copper River just below the mouth of Tanada Creek. Batzulnetas Billy, who died in 1942, was a *kaskae* at the same time as Charley Sanford. Billy was born on the Tanana River at the village of Salchaket, near present day Salcha and was taken to Batzulnetas by his father. Soon after they got there his father died, so Billy was raised in Batzulnetas, eventually marrying a woman from Tetlin named Jesse (Gene Henry 2000). Gene Henry of Dot Lake was Batzulnetas Billy's son.

Site 68: *Tanaadi Menn'* (moving water lake), also known as Tanada Lake or Benzaneta Lake
Tanaadi Menn' (see Reckord 1983b, 207–212), was the source of Tanada Creek that emptied into the upper Copper River (Kari 2014, 110). The Ahtna name for the lake refers to a giant fish, described in Ahtna *yenida'a* stories, which once inhabited the lake. The lake was a stop on the way to the uplands and a staging area for upland hunting expeditions. It was also known as a starvation place because one could almost always get something to eat from the lake. It was especially important during the early spring when large animals were scarce and soft snow made travel difficult. During that time of year people harvested burbot and lake trout through the ice. Either side of a narrow passage connecting Tanada Lake with a smaller lake called *C'amen* (opposite lake) is optimal for harvesting fish during the summer and hunting migratory waterfowl and muskrats during the spring and early summer. Huston Sanford commented that there were lots of caches located along Tanada Creek used to store food and implements. Some of these caches were pits lined with bark while others were high caches built up off the ground (BIA 1995a).

There are several different sites located in the vicinity of Tanada Lake. These include the following: Tommy Jackson's cabin; *Xayde Sdelts'iixde* (where we stay in winter) referred to as a tent camp; *K'eseh* the outlet of Tanada Creek; *Cen Ce'e*, also known as Flat Cabin or big flat, a camp for staging Dall sheep hunts; and *Men Diłeni caegge*, described as a base camp for staging sheep hunts.

Site 69: *Dzah Nii Menn'* (rarely said lake), also known as Copper Lake or Billy Lake
Dzah Nii Menn' (Kari 2014, 109) was the location of a village (Reckord 1983b, 206), but there is little information about it. Copper Lake was in the hunting territory of Batzulnetas Billy, hence the name Billy Lake.

Site 70: *Desuun' Na'* (good area creek), also known as Jack Creek
The Ahtna name *Desuun' Na'* (Kari 2014, 111) refers to the relative abundance of fish in this creek. In spring, Arctic grayling migrate between Jack Lake and Jack Creek, so there was "easy fishing," and there are muskrats in the lake, along with ducks and geese.

Like Jack Creek itself, the surrounding area has considerable Ahtna/Upper Tanana habitation history. In the 1920s and 1930s several Ahtna families settled in the vicinity of the Nabesna Road where the road crossed Chalk Creek and Lost Creek. A third settlement called Twin Lakes came later (Reckord 1983b). Jack Creek flows out of Jack Lake, which is fed by Little Jack Creek. Below Jack Lake, three creeks flow into Jack Creek and offer access to the uplands of the Mentasta Mountains, prime habitat for sheep, caribou, moose, and ground squirrels. These creeks are Trail Creek, Lost Creek, and Chalk Creek. On upper Chalk Creek, near Big Grayling Lake (*Łuug Hoołiin Mann'*), there was a salt lick that attracted sheep and made the area particularly attractive to hunters.

Archaeological evidence indicates that the Ahtna have inhabited the Jack Creek drainage for generations, and they continue to hunt in the drainage for moose and sheep (BIA 1994b). Wilson Justin, who was born in the 1950s, described how, in more recent times, he and his family hunted moose and snared ground squirrels (referred to as "gophers" in the story below) in the high country of Lost Creek. Justin then went on to describe the trail system that ran from Suslota across upper Trail and Lost creeks to the Nabesna River (Trail J):

> There are places up Lost Creek near where our horse trail crosses, actually just above there [there are] old time cuttings from old Indian camps and you'll find pots and pans that are probably a hundred years old still on the trees up the Lost Creek. Lena [Charley's] old moose hunting area is up Lost Creek. And we used to hunt moose up near the head of Lost Creek when I was young [in the 1950s]. So, there is, if there's any place where we had hunting overnight camps would be up Lost Creek rather than Trail Creek.
>
> Trail Creek was always harder to hunt than Lost Creek. The one thing I remember about Lost Creek more than anything else, is that we used to go up there for gophers. Go all the way up to the, almost to the end of Lost Creek where it hits the mountains and then we'd spend four or five days up there with pack dogs snaring gophers. That'd be middle of July, for some odd reason, that it turned out to be more of them up there than Trail Creek. So I remember Lost Creek more for what little moose hunting we did but I remember it more for trapping gophers and porcupine than anything else (Justin 2012).

From Lost Creek a trail led westward to Trail Creek and upper Suslota Creek, then down to Suslota Creek and Suslota Lake. Going east from Chalk Creek one could travel past Karen Lake, to Soda Creek, and down Platinum Creek to the Nabesna River. Wilson Justin described the trail system and recalled hearing "lots and lots" of stories about Chalk Creek, because it was one stop on a trail system between Mentasta and the Nabesna River:

> [If you were] from Suslota village, you go up Suslota valley come over the pass, hit Trail Creek, and come down Trail Creek. The trail [from Suslota was] joined [by] a trail from Mentasta around the lower end of Suslota Lake and on the north or the south flanks of the Mentasta Mountains about two, three miles to the left of the Nabesna road.
>
> […] So the Suslota trail and Mentasta trail joins there [and] runs above Trail Creek and angles towards Lost Creek and hits Chalk Creek directly so about four miles after the Mentasta and Suslota trail join, straight up the valley, you're right on the trail, that's Chalk Creek. So, that trail has like five other trails too but that's the main one, that's the one they [use], winter trail and summer trail (Justin 2012).

Site 71: *Tthee Baa Ndiig* (UT:[6] grey stone creek), also known as Lost Creek
Tthee Baa Ndiig (Kari 2014, 112) was the site of a village established in 1934 or 1935 after Chalk Creek village was abandoned. Jack John Justin (1992) said people were living at Lost Creek:

> […] since 1934 I think and before that here and there you know. They come in here [Lost Creek] in 1934, they built first house in 1936 here, no 1935 I guess. John Sanford and Frank Sanford built the first cabins.

He added that people left Lost Creek in 1941; some moved to Batzulnetas and others to Nabesna.

The Lost Creek site is composed of a village, a cemetery, and camp. Lost Creek village was established to take advantage of the presence of the Nabesna Road. The residents made a living by hunting and fishing and selling food and wood to the mine at Nabesna. They also worked on road maintenance, hauled freight, and carried the mail (BIA 1994b).

Site 72: *Uts'en Kac'ilaegga Menn'* (from it fish swim up lake), also known as Twin Lakes
Uts'en Kac'ilaegge Menn' (Kari 2014, 111) is noted for its food sources, especially fish species that are available during the spring. According to oral tradition, the grandmother of Harry Frank and Oscar Jimmy owned a cabin at Twin Lakes. Her name was Niscaks and she used the site from about 1900 to 1920, fishing for grayling during the winter (BIA 1994a). In a 2012 interview Wilson Justin provided an overview of the area, including who lived there and what they did:

> Twin Lakes is kind of new. Chalk Creek was the real Twin Lakes but, Twin Lakes come into being because of the road [Nabesna Road]. Before that Daisy Nicolai used to camp there along with couple other people, this older guy from Northway, I forget his name, but I think Shorty Frank had a cache down there between Twin Lakes and Jack Lake so it was a combination of a trapping site and a spring fishing site but once the road came in it started to become more and more of a settlement and the United States Postal Service built that old cabin at Twin Lakes for a mail stop.
>
> They had one down on Jack Creek and then they moved it up to Twin Lakes and the settlement came into being after World War II. Twin Lakes was primarily a winter trapping, spring trapping, spring fishing location because from Tanada Lake you came over to Twin Lakes for about two months and then went on to Nabesna [Bar] (Justin 2012).

[6]In this and subsequent entries, the designation UT indicates place names that are in the Upper Tanana language.

Site 73: *Tsabaey Ggaay Kulaen Na'* (small fish exists creek), also known as Chalk Creek
Tsabaey Ggaay Kulaen Na' (Kari 2014, 114) was the location of Chalk Creek village, established in the 1920s by a small group of Ahtna and a white man named Fred Chalk. The village was abandoned after 1930 when Chalk took his own life (BIA 1994b). From Chalk Creek, a trail led to Soda Creek (Trail I).

Site 74: *C'enaagga Na'* (salt lick creek), also known as Soda Creek
C'enaagga Na' is a tributary of Platinum Creek, which borders the Mentasta Mountains on the north and Boyden Hills to the south. Where the valley widens at the confluence of Platinum and Soda creeks was the site of a large hunting camp used by Ahtna families in the fall and winter. Dall sheep were attracted to the salt lick on *C'enaagga Na',* so large numbers of people congregated there from as far away as the Copper River, Mentasta, and Suslota (BIA 1995b). Jack John Justin said that "Copper River Indians" from Suslota hunted along the edge of the Mentasta Mountains from upper Suslota Creek to Soda Creek. To reach Soda Creek from the Nabesna side, Upper Tanana people traveled up Platinum Creek.

Platinum Creek has its headwaters in the Mentasta Mountains and flows southeast through a narrow canyon onto the Nabesna River flood plain. There was a village located at the mouth of Platinum Creek (see Site 75, below) and a trail that went up Platinum Creek leading to Soda Creek, and on to Chalk Creek, Lost Creek and eventually to the village of Suslota at the outlet of Suslota Lake. A trail also ran from the mouth of Platinum Creek across the Nabesna River through Cooper Pass to Chisana, the White River, and beyond (Trail I). Before construction of the Nabesna Road in 1933, the Platinum Creek trail was a major transportation artery used to haul freight (Mendenhall and Schrader 1903, 43).

Site 75: *Det'aan Caegge* (falcon mouth)
Located at the mouth of Falcon Creek, *Det'aan Caegge* was a pre-colonial village. According to Jack John Justin, it was the oldest of four sites on the upper Nabesna River, "way before white people came in, they didn't hear or speaking English or anything." No physical evidence remains of the village, but Justin described it as a "regular old village" with house pits, underground caches, and sweat baths (Reckord 1983b, 219). In the winter of 1929, Nabesna John told the anthropologist Robert McKennan (1959, 170) this story about Platinum Creek. At the time of Nabesna John's great grandfather, a raiding party came into the area from around present-day Fairbanks. When the raiding party reached the upper Nabesna River they looked for the people who were camped on upper Platinum Creek and could not find them. That night when the raiding party was camped, one old man discovered a trail. The next day they followed the trail and discovered the camp on upper Platinum Creek. At the time all the Upper Tanana men were out hunting and only women and children were left. The war party murdered most of the women and children, keeping two girls as prisoners. Finally, the raiding party thought it had killed everyone, eliminating the possibility of revenge. What they did not know was that ten men from Platinum Creek had been caught far away from home and were unable to return to camp. The raiders also did not know that there were additional camps of Upper Tanana people at Chisana and White River.

The raiding party started on the journey home. Because it was cold, they stopped to make a fire and the two girls were able to escape and make their way back to Platinum Creek, where they met the returning hunting party. Immediately the men wanted to go after the Lower Tanana war party, but the girls dissuaded them, saying the raiding party was too powerful for ten men. Instead the girls and men went to the camps on the Chisana and White rivers where they incited the men to war. Eventually the Upper Tanana men started out on the trail of the Lower Tanana war party, catching them somewhere on the Tanana River above Fairbanks and killing them all.

HUNTING AT THE HEAD OF THE COPPER RIVER

Map 11 (previous section) shows sites 76–86, located within the Upper Ahtna region (sometimes considered to be Upper Tanana borderlands).

Recent discoveries of projectile points and other artifacts in receding ice patches high in the headwaters country show that upland hunting has been important to the Ahtna for hundreds if not thousands of years (Vanderhoek et al. 2012). Sheep was a mainstay of the traditional diet, providing meat, skin for winter clothing, and bone and horn for tools.

According to Katie John, Charley Sanford and Bill Henry left *Nataełde* near the end of August and headed into the mountains to hunt sheep and snare ground squirrels. John's father, Charley Sanford, had a hunting territory that included Tanada Lake and the mountains east and south of the lake (Trail J). Billy Henry or Batzulnetas Billy, Gene Henry's father, had a hunting territory that included the main Copper River flowing out of Copper Glacier, an area called *Ts'itu' Tl'aa ngge'* or "Major River Headwaters." Included in this area were Copper Lake and a mountain called *Sez'aann* or "Heart," also translated as "Inside Me" (hill 6580). They hunted caribou at *Ts'oo Dzaay Na'* (brushy spruce creek) or Drop Creek.

Map 11 shows waypoints along the routes taken by Charley Sanford and Billy Henry as they traveled from *Nataełde* into the Wrangell Mountains to hunt sheep. The numbers on the map are from Katie John's narrative published by Kari (1986, 2010).

Site 76: *Baa Łaedzi Cii* (grey soil point)
Baa Łaedzi Cii (grey soil point) was a place people stopped on their way to *Nataełde*. It was located on the north bank of Copper River one mile above Slana.

Site 77: *Uk'e Nic'ahwdetsedzi* (on it dry wood goes out from shore)
Uk'e Nic'ahwdetsedzi (on it dry wood goes out from shore) was another place people stopped.

Site 67: *Nataełde* – Repeated from the earlier listing of Site 67, above.

Site 78: *Ta'abael K'edigha* (by the one with spruce on it)
Ta'abael K'edigha (by the one with spruce on it) was a hill south of *Nataełde*. Katie John said this was the first place her family stopped on their way into the Wrangell Mountains.

Site 79: *K'eseh* (outlet)
The outlet of Tanada Lake, *K'eseh*, was an important camping place.

Site 80: *Men Diłeni* (one that flows into lake mountain), also known as Camp Creek
Men Diłeni (Kari 2014, 110) is a creek that flows into Tanada Lake on southeast shore. If there were no sheep there, Katie said the family moved on to *Ts'akae Gggan* (Site 82, below).

Site 81: *Łedidlende* (where streams join), also known as Goat Creek
Łedidlende was a location where John said they could reliably kill sheep.

Site 82: *Ts'akae Gggan* (the thin lady was lowered on a rope)
Ts'akae Gggan was a creek off of Tanada Peak flowing into Goat Creek that the family passed by. Wilson Justin (2013) said this name relates to a period of starvation and the attempt of young girl to retrieve a dying sheep by being dangled off the cliff.

Site 83: *Men Niłgha'aa Delyaade* (lakes connected together)
Men Niłgha'aa Delyaade (lakes connected together) were lakes located at the source of Goat and Jacksina creeks.

Site 84: *Nitsic'ełggodi Tl'aa* (rock is chipped headwaters), also known as the headwaters of Jacksina Creek
On entering *Nitsic'ełggodi Tl'aa*, the family headed into the Nabesna River drainage. From Jacksina Creek they moved out into the lowlands of the Nabesna River to *Kats'etses Na'* (Site 85, below).

Site 85: *Kats'etses Na'* (we lift up a bow creek), also known as Pass Creek

Site 86: *Tsae T'aax Na'* (beneath rock creek), also known as Wait Creek
Tsae T'aax Na' was the next place where the family stopped on their journey after *Kats'etses Na'* (Site 85). From there they could swing around to Łedidlende or Goat Creek where a meat cache was located. The meat would be carried back to *Tanaade Meen'* and the camp at *K'eseh.* From there they returned to *Nataełde* and then to *Bes Ce'e* (big bank) or New Suslota.

Gene Henry's Travel Routes in the upper Copper River basin

Gene Henry's family spent the entire winter at the headwaters of the Copper River, living on sheep meat and trapping. Henry and his father spent all of their time hunting while his mother prepared the meat and skins used for mattresses and winter clothing. The family killed about thirty sheep, both ewes and rams. Henry made the point that moose were scarce and people lived primarily on sheep with a few caribou "on the side:"

> Long time ago, you know, my father lived Batzulnetas, down Batzulnetas village. […] [F] all time we go up mountain kill sheep, dry them for winter. We come back. We might get few caribou on the side too. We get little caribou meat, but isn't very much moose them years. Now moose all over. That time, no moose over there, way up there in the mountains sometime, mountain side somewhere you see moose but not too many around here, nothing no moose them days. And, we out hunting, hunting sheep way up in the mountain, we get quite a few sheep and dry them for winter and we get caribou on the side too sometime.
>
> *Sez'aann,* he call it *Sez'aann* [Heart Mt north of Copper River]. That's on top there we get sheep. Pretty bad rocky mountain but we [have a] few place to get up there. We get on top there, we kill sheep all the time. And the other place, on the other side. *Tsitaeł* ["wide head" or Mt. 5530 east of Tanada Lake] he call, on the other side. A creek comes down out of that mountain there, every creek we go for sheep hunting. We move around to get sheep all the time, that's the way we get game. That's my young days. I just ten, fifteen, twenty years old them days. Healthy, strong, not [like] today.

Interviewer: Did you go towards Mount Sanford?

> Gene: Yeah, up in the mountain, way up there, way up headed toward the mountain Sanford. Little creek up there he called *Ts'oo Dzaay Na'* [Drop Creek] that creek come down to Copper River, way down there. About two or three miles from Batzulnetas. Right across, we break trail at that creek there. It's our hunting ground for wintertime.

> We kill caribou up there, head of that river. That's the way we used to live, get a little game for winter. Get a little meat once in a while. We live on game but we take care of them (Henry 2000).

Adam Sanford told de Laguna and McClellan that he used to kill caribou, moose, and sheep on *Sez'aann* (heart; colloquially referred to as Black Mountain), near Copper Lake. Sanford said:

> Used to hunt at Heart Hill, put dry meat in skin boat and go down to Chistochina. In 1908 I done this. It took two days to come down. One day I could do it, but I stop some place. There's lots of sheep all around, caribou and moose. I do that in August month (de Laguna and McClellan 1960, Box 7.1, 7.11.60).

UPPER NABESNA AND CHISANA RIVERS

Map 12 shows sites 87–94, located in the Upper Tanana – Upper Ahtna borderlands.

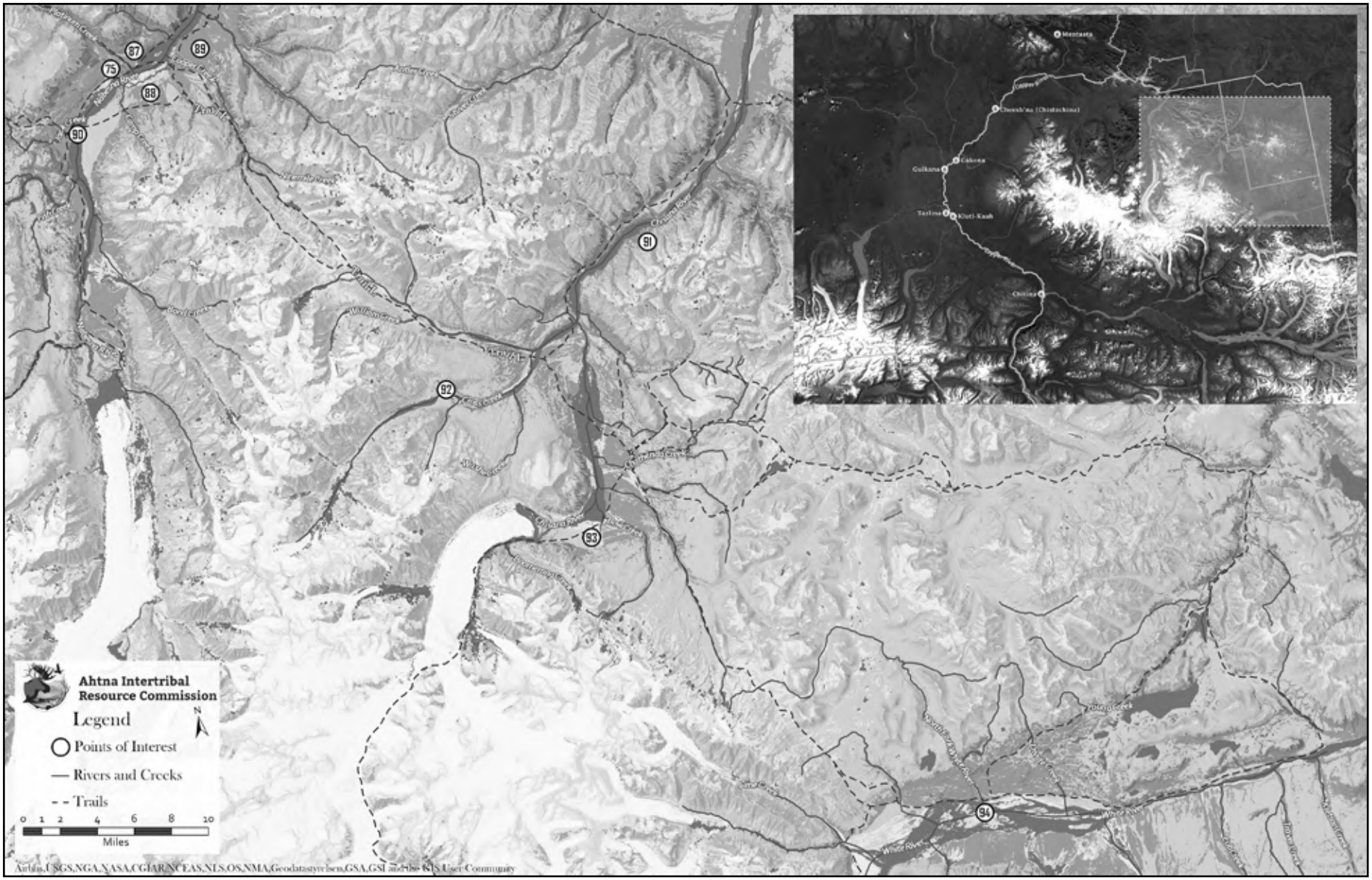
Site 87: *Nabaes Na* (type of ? stone river), also known as the Nabesna River
Nabaes Na (type of ? stone river) is the Nabesna River (Kari 2014, 113). Sometime before 1901, Ahtna living at the mouth of Platinum Creek moved across the Nabesna River to Camp Creek. After a shaman died at Camp Creek, the people moved to the mouth of Cooper Creek (BIA n.d.). At the end of World War II people living at Cooper Creek moved back across the Nabesna River to Nabesna Bar. Jack John Justin said that the people living on the upper Nabesna had two special mountains that acted as banners or signs and were referred to in potlatch speeches: *Taatsiig* or "Ocher Water" referred to as the happy face, on Totschunda Creek, and *Ttheet'aaniluu* or "Out Beneath Rock" (Kari 1986).

Site 88: *Daxuhtąą' Cheeg* (UT: flat-topped mountain mouth)
Located at the mouth of Camp Creek,[7] *Daxuhtąą' Cheeg* (Kari 2014, 112) was the site of what settlers called Stampede Village (Kari 2010, 112), comprising people from Copper River, Batzulnetas, and Platinum Creek (BIA 1995c). Camp Creek is mentioned by McKennan (1959, 18) who writes that a site older than Cooper Creek Village was located on the east bank of the Nabesna River two miles upstream but had been abandoned after the "death of a powerful shaman." According to Ahtna elder Laura Hancock, there was a source of red ocher on Camp Creek, which was used as face and body paint, for painting sacred pictures on doors and beams, and for decorating bows and arrows, snowshoes, and clothing (Reckord 1983b, 224). Six grave houses were located somewhere near the mouth of Camp Creek. One had a Russian Orthodox cross, and another was painted red, possibly with red ocher (BIA 1995c).

Site 89: *Tsighaan Caegg* (UT: brain mouth), also known as Cooper Creek village
Tsighaan Caegg is a village at the mouth of Tsighaan Na' (brain creek), which is named for the color of its water – an off-white resembling the solution of water and brains used to tan skins (Kari 1986, 209). The village was located on the east side of the Nabesna River near the mouth of Cooper Creek. In her description of the community, Reckord (1983b, 225) wrote that the history of Cooper Creek Village is "tied closely to the history of transportation and mineral development in the Alaskan interior." There were two trails up Cooper Creek and through Cooper Pass used to haul freight and mail to Chisana; one was used in winter, the other in summer (Trail L).

According to Jack John Justin, Cooper Creek was first a tent camp occupied about 1910–1912. Charley Toby's great-great grandfather was said to have founded the community (BIA 1996b, 6), although he is not mentioned as an earlier resident by Jack John Justin, who said that some of the earliest residents were Nicholas Jackson, John Jackson, Albert Jackson, and Oscar Jimmy (BIA 1996b).

[7]This Camp Creek, which flows directly into the Nabesna River, is different from *Men Diłeni* (Site 80), the Camp Creek that flows into Tanada Lake.



Map 12: Approximate locations of Ahtna/Upper Tanana habitation sites in the upper Nabesna and upper Chisana Rivers valleys.

Fortunately, there is considerable documentation about life at Cooper Creek during the early twentieth century thanks to McKennan, who arrived at Cooper Creek Village on November 26, 1929, and stayed nearly two months, leaving on January 18, 1930. To McKennan, Cooper Creek Village was a "picturesque spot" and met with "his dream of an Indian village." He goes on to say that the "village sits on a cut bank overlooking the river bar. In the background are dark spruce trees while in the foreground are the Indian cabins with their little caches in front resting on stilts" (quoted in Mishler and Simeone 2006, 51–52). At the time there was very little food in the village, and everyone was living almost entirely on meat from caribou they had killed in the fall.

In the winter of 1929–30 there were four Native families living at Cooper Creek: the families of Chisana Joe, Nabesna John, Scottie Creek Titus, and Andy Toby. Chisana Joe and Nabesna John were brothers and they had a sister named Corinne who was married to Titus. Andy Toby's deceased father was their maternal uncle. Along with several children there was "old Mama," the mother of Chisana Joe, Nabesna John, and Corinne (McKennan 1959, 121). These families are the ancestors of the Albert and Frank families of Northway, and ancestors of the Sanford and Justin families of Nabesna Bar, Chistochina, and Mentasta (Reckord 1983b, 230). The ethnic background of the residents reflected the fact that Cooper Creek was located on the boundary between the Ahtna and Upper Tanana, so everyone was trilingual, speaking Ahtna, Upper Tanana, and some English.

Wilson Justin (2012) provided additional information about Cooper Creek:

> I don't know much about [Cooper Creek].
> I know it mainly because it's a trail, it's a mail trail and it's part of the old *Ałts'en tnaey* trail and that's where the, 1918 epidemic hit and took out almost the whole village and right after that, originally everybody moved out either to Tetlin or to Northway or elsewhere, and over here [Chistochina] or what have you. When I last went down there maybe [in] 1983, [it was a] very ghostly place, all the buildings had been burnt down. There were still shovels under the trees, like about seven or eight shovels there, left under the trees.
>
> There was, all the way up Cooper Creek, there was old traps, small traps hanging in trees and then on the trail that used to be from Cooper Creek to [Cooper] pass, that was washed out but there's an older trail, the *Ałts'en tnaey* trail as I call it, about a mile and a half to the south of Cooper Creek that's parallel to that creek. Some people call it Game Trail but Jack John said it was the old trade trail that went up the Nabesna River across to Jacksina [Creek] went up Wade Creek over Wade Creek went above Copper Lake or Tanada Lake above Tanada through Drop Creek, through Boulder Creek, through Sanford, hit the Dadina, went up the Dadina, went over the glacier, came back down the Dadina, then crossed the Copper River. That's that trail that come right along side [*sic*] Cooper but I don't know that much about Cooper Creek except it was a trail and all the deaths that occurred around there and the families leaving.

Site 90: *Dehsõõ' Cheeg* (UT: good area mouth), also known as Nabesna Bar

Dehsõõ' Cheeg (Kari 2014, 112) is located at the mouth of Jack Creek (BIA 1996c). It is not an old settlement, but was started by a nonnative named R. K. Stewart, who built the first cabin in 1927. Stewart then gave the house to Jack John Justin, who in turn gave it to a prospector named Jimmy Brown in the 1930s or early 1940s. Two other nonnatives, Harry Boyden and Andy Brown, built a second cabin at about the same time. Boyden had arrived in the area in 1911 and hauled freight, delivered mail, and prospected. In the early 1930s, an airstrip was built at Nabesna Bar for planes hauling ore from the Nabesna Mine. Beginning in 1941, Bob Reeve began flying freight from there to Northway to facilitate the construction of the military runway at Northway. Between June and October of 1941, Reeve flew 11,000 tons of equipment

and supplies to Northway. During World War II, the airstrip was lengthened to 10,000 feet and used as an emergency strip for lend-lease planes being flown to the Soviet Union (BIA 1996b).

Easton (2021, 81) described the settlement's history during and after the war:

> The [Reeves Field] airstrip became an important commercial hub for the region until the construction of the "Abercrombie Trail," a road extension from the Richardson Highway at Slana to the Nabesna mines (now known as the Nabesna Road) in 1934. Several Native families moved to Nabesna Bar about this time, with the remaining occupants of Cooper Creek village moving across the river to Nabesna Bar in the mid-1940s. The cabins and other structures at *Tthiixaa' Cheeg* were destroyed in an accidental fire, although accounts disagree about the timing of the fire. In an interview with Jim Kari (1986:209), Jack John Justin dated the fire to 1943 or 1944. Although that account doesn't identify the fire as resulting in abandonment of the village, several authors connect the fire to move [*sic*] of the remaining occupants to Nabesna Bar (e.g., BIA 1996[b]:6). Holly Reckord (1983[b]:231), however, suggests that the cabins at the site were used occasionally by people hunting, fishing, and trapping for another decade, before the village was destroyed by a fire in the mid-1950s.

Those who moved from the mouth of Cooper Creek to Nabesna Bar were Nabesna John, Jack John Justin, Lena Charley, Frank Sanford, Daisy Sanford, Johnny Nicolai, Glenn Burrell, and Andy Toby (Easton 2021, 82). During the following decades, residents became increasingly oriented toward the Copper River communities of Mentasta, Slana, and Chistochina. Nabesna Bar was occupied until the 1990s when the last resident, Jack John Justin, moved to Chistochina.

Site 91: *Tsetsaan' Na'* (copper river), also known as the Chisana River

Notch Creek and Cross Creek join together and their combined waters flow into the upper *Tsetsaan' Na'* (Kari 2014, 114). At the site where the two creeks conjoin was the village of Cross Creek. As noted earlier, Dene living on the upper Nabesna and Chisana rivers spoke both the Upper Ahtna and Upper Tanana languages and were referred to as *Ddhał Tot'iin*, or "Among the Mountains People."

Site 92: *Tsayh Cheegn* (UT: ocher creek mouth), also known as Cross Creek mouth

Tsayh Cheegn (Kari 2014, 114) was the location of a village that predates the discovery of gold at Chisana in 1913. Bureau of Indian Affairs archaeologists report depressions at Cross Creek village that represent semi-subterranean houses, and oral tradition says it was a former winter village. Nabesna John built the first log cabin in 1911, and eventually six cabins were built in a straight line from north to south. These belonged to Charley Tobey, Joe Jedson, Peter Albert, Andy Toby, and Billy Jedson (BIA 1993). There are two separate graveyards: one in the village itself and another on a nearby knoll (Reckord 1983b, 238–239).

Ruby Sinyon said she had never been to Cross Creek Village, but she knew many of the people who came from that area including Nabesna John, Chisana Joe and his wife Polly, and Chisana Billy and his wife. Andy Toby also lived there, as did Joe Justin. Sinyon recalled:

> That's from Nabesna village, other side of [Nabesna] river. No, all the way up from that village [Cooper Creek], you go up and Cooper Creek, Notch Creek, and Sanford's cabin and Chisana [the town]. That place I hear lotta grey house but I never see it. Sanford's cabin, that's where old village [Cross Creek] they said. All full grey house, they say, I never saw, I never walk around, I never see. The other side of [Chisana] river from Chisana [the town], two white people make store, and they make lotta house that's why that Wilson's daddy [Nabesna John] and Polly [Joe] and her husband [Chisana Joe], and [Chisana] Billy and his wife, and that's Cherrie's [Nicolai's] mother, all them, those white people there that side, they move it. That's how they move other

side. Chisana, no grey house nothing just only that Joe Justin, one his, his grandchild and Andy Toby's wife. I don't know how many kid there but they all the other side, that's all buried there. Four of them and his wife buried there. Lots of time, I ask Cherrie, she don't know nothing (Sinyon 2012).

Site 93: Chisana

The town of Chisana was founded around the 1913 discovery of gold on the upper Chisana River. The neighboring town of Bonanza was founded at the same time. The boom was brief and by the 1920s both communities were largely abandoned (Easton 2021). In the aftermath, the headwaters country remained relatively isolated with no towns, schools, electricity, stores, churches, or hospitals. The 1920 census counted ninety-five Native people at Chisana, many from the lower Nabesna River, but by 1929 most had left the area, either moving back to the lower Nabesna River or over to the village at the mouth of Cooper Creek (McKennan 1959). In the 1930s the population shifted again, and during the 1930s the town of Chisana contained a substantial Native community, with several cabins grouped just northeast of the airstrip. Residents included Chisana Joe, Jack John Justin, Charley Toby, Cherry Nicolai, Bessie Joe, Suzie Joe, and Martha Mark (Bleakley 2007). Although living in town and working in the gold diggings, the Native people continued to hunt and trap when these activities were productive and went back to cash labor at Chisana during the summer.

Johnny Nicolai, who was raised by Nabesna John, recalled that he moved to Chisana in 1937, where he met his wife Cherrie Toby, who was the daughter of Andy Toby, who had lived at Cross Creek and who McKennan saw at Cooper Creek village in 1929. Johnny Nicolai said that in 1937 a number of Ahtna lived at Chisana including Jack John Justin, Chisana Joe, and Chisana Billy. Upper Tanana people also came to Chisana, including White River Johnny, Bill John, Titus John, Joe Mark, Shorty, and Steven and Harry Frank. White River Johnny worked in the gold diggings at Chisana and trapped throughout the area from Beaver Creek to the upper Nabesna River (Easton 2021, 70). After World War II he became a big game guide, which took the place of gold mining as the primary method for making money.

Site 94: *Nadzax Na'* (murky river), also known as the White River

Nadzax Na' (Kari 2014, 115) is a large tributary of the Yukon River that drains the northeastern slope of the Wrangell Mountains. Jack John Justin, who was born at Chisana in 1906, recalled that his family moved back and forth between the upper White River and upper Copper River. In 1912, Justin lived at a village on North Fork Island called *Tl'oh'Gaihk'e* or "On the White Grass" on the upper White River (Kari 1986). The island was a trading rendezvous for Ahtna, Upper Tanana, and Southern Tutchone people from the Yukon Territory (McKennan 1959). Justin also lived at Tchawsahmon or Tazamona Lake, just over the US-Canada border. In the Upper Tanana language, the lake is called *Chidah łeeh Männ* or "fish channeled into weir lake." Mary Tyone (1996) said there were lake trout, grayling, ling cod, and pike in the lake and people used to block the stream that flows out from the lake in order to catch fish. Tyone's mother was born near *Chidah łeeh Männ* at a place called *Naat'aayät's* cradle [Mt. Natazhat on the upper White River], and several of her maternal and paternal relatives are buried at *Chidah łeeh Männ.* Jack John Justin (1992) said that people came to the lake from various locations to fish and hunt Dall sheep and moose.

Rich in animals, the upper White River was also a source of raw copper that could be picked up off the ground on Kletsan Creek, a tributary of the White. Ahtna and Upper Tanana used the copper to produce arrowheads, awls, beads, personal adornment, knife blades, and copper wire (Pratt 1998; Cooper 2006). In 1898 the geologist Alfred H. Brooks ascended the White River and encountered a group of Native people digging for copper nuggets on Kletsan Creek.

Copper in various forms was traded throughout eastern Alaska. A man known as Copper Chief, discussed in the Copper section of Chapter 3, controlled the trade in copper coming from Kletsan Creek.

CHAPTER 9: THE PRESENT AND FUTURE OF ETHNOGRAPHY IN THE AHTNA REGION

The preceding chapters have drawn from existing anthropological and other academic materials about the Ahtna, along with the vast amounts of archival and interview data. The earliest written descriptions of the Ahtna date back more than two centuries to Russian sources such as Wrangell (1980 [1839]), followed by the accounts of early US military and geological expeditions into the region. Directed ethnographic research has primarily been conducted during the past seventy years. While a substantial number of books, articles, and reports on the Ahtna have been published, many of them focused on specific topics, as Ainsworth (2001, 8) has noted. De Laguna's 1969–70 article discusses human-animal relations in Ahtna traditional culture, for instance, while Strong's 1972 dissertation examines the economics of subsistence production. Numerous other Ahtna ethnographies have examined other themes, such as habitation and land-use (Kari 2014; Reckord 1983b; Simeone 2014; West 1973), language (Kari's work), subsistence issues (Holen 2004; Reckord 1983a), and Ahtna relationships with specific kinds of animals used for subsistence (e.g., Simeone 2006; Simeone and Kari 2002, 2005). Appendix B is an annotated bibliography that provides synopses of the key sources.

Only a few works have truly attempted to describe Ahtna culture in a systematic or generalized way, as per the conventions of classic ethnography. The best-known of these is de Laguna and McClellan's 1981 article "Ahtna" in the Smithsonian Institution's *Handbook of North American Indians* series. While this work provides a thorough overview of Ahtna culture, it is constrained in its depth and level of detail by the format of the publication. De Laguna and McClellan had planned to eventually publish a full-length ethnography. However, they are now both deceased, and it is unclear whether Marie-Françoise Guédon, their literary executrix, will complete this project. Moreover, cultural anthropology in the 2020s is a different discipline than it was in the 1950s, when de Laguna and McClellan begun their fieldwork in the Copper River Basin. Modern cultural anthropology does not prioritize encyclopedic depictions; it generally favors more focused, interpretive accounts that explicitly acknowledge the limitations of their authors' perspectives. However, generalized depictions are still useful for many purposes. To non-specialists, ethnographic overviews and cultural profiles can provide a thorough survey of a culture in a single work. Recently, Simeone's (2018) *Ahtna: Netseh Dae' Tkughit'e' "Before Us, It Was Like This"* has begun to fill this gap, as a volume-length cultural profile developed in collaboration with Ahtna culture-bearers. This current report has drawn heavily from Simeone (2018), but is directed toward a different audience and focuses attention on human landscapes within Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. This work gives a broad, multifaceted overview of Ahtna culture that we hope will be useful for people who have limited familiarity with Ahtna ethnography or Ahtna culture in general. This work also seeks to provide a review of available literature on Ahtna and Copper Basin ethnography and identify data gaps.

Given the lack of a book-length ethnography based on the work of de Laguna and her colleagues, we hope that this project will contribute toward the increased accessibility of archival sources of information on Ahtna ethnography, especially the de Laguna and McClellan collection. These materials are an extremely important source on Ahtna history and culture. They are voluminous and finely detailed and include interviews with many culture-bearers whose knowledge has since been lost. Fortunately, these fieldnotes have become more available and accessible during the past twenty years. To our knowledge, partial or complete collections currently exist at the following locations:

- National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC: A large collection of original materials from de Laguna's long career, including some sound recordings and associated fieldnotes from her work with the Ahtna. A finding aid to the collection and digital copies of some Ahtna materials are available for download from the Smithsonian Online Virtual Archives website: https://sova.si.edu/;

- Alaska State Library Historical Collections (ASL), Juneau, AK: A digitized collection of de Laguna and McClellan's fieldnotes, as well as negatives and prints of most of their photographs from the Copper River basin;
- Alaska Native Language Center, University of Alaska Fairbanks, Fairbanks, AK: A partial collection of the fieldnotes;
- Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission, Glennallen, AK: A digitized copy of the fieldnotes obtained from the Alaska State Library Historical Collections, low-resolution scans of prints in the photo collection (all available photos from the Copper Basin), and paper copies of some fieldnotes that researchers Simeone et al. (2007) obtained at the Smithsonian Institution; and
- American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, PA: Partial collections of fieldnotes, recordings and photographs that can be searched and ordered from their website (https://search.amphilsoc.org/collections/search).

ESTABLISHMENT OF AN AHTNA ARCHIVE

There is a pressing need for a centralized, stable, and curated archive in the Copper Basin to house ethnographic and related materials about the Ahtna. Unfortunately, many sources of primary ethnographic data on the Ahtna are not actively curated, are unavailable in the Copper Basin to interested parties, or both. Ahtna Heritage Foundation houses hundreds of ethnographic interviews and other materials from numerous projects, but it has been inactive since the late 2010s. Interested parties, including tribal members, have no clear way to access most of these materials. Making these materials as complete and accessible as possible should be a priority.

Currently, the digital copies of fieldnotes from de Laguna and colleagues that are held by AITRC and ASL are in a non-text PDF file format. In order to make the fieldnotes as accessible as possible, the digital files should be converted into a PDF format that allows the text to be searched so that future researchers and tribal members can easily find information. (In the meantime, the authors of this report have created an index of the fieldnotes' contents, including content headings, page numbers, and some quotes and paraphrases from the contents).

Obtaining a complete collection of higher-quality digital scans of the de Laguna and McClellan photo collection for easy use and distribution within the Copper River Basin is also a worthwhile objective, as is obtaining copies of any audio recordings of songs and stories, which many Ahtna consider an invaluable part of their cultural and familial heritage. While these recordings exist in national collections (i.e., Smithsonian Institution and American Philosophical Society), they are unavailable in Alaska. Although the de Laguna collection is an important starting point for an Ahtna archive, it should not stop there. An effort should be made to seek out and curate copies of fieldnotes from other researchers as well as copies of any published or grey literature reports about the Ahtna so that they are available to interested Ahtna tribal citizens, researchers, and organizations. Such a collection could potentially include long-term scientific datasets, legal histories, and so on. AITRC has expressed interest in building a digital archive, and as of 2023 is actively seeking funding for its development.

DATA GAPS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While this ethnographic overview and assessment has sought to provide an overview of existing ethnographic materials concerning the Ahtna and their connections to the lands that are now within Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, it also reflects limitations and gaps in the ethnographic record. There are several themes and questions that could be further explored to better understand the Ahtna and their contemporary connections to the park.

Much of this EO&A's content has focused on Ahtna culture as it was in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as this is the time period for which the most data are available. As explained in Chapter 1, it is based on secondary data, including previously published and archival sources.

Unfortunately, focusing on a specific time period comes with the risk of reifying the past, or implying that contemporary Ahtna culture is somehow less authentically Ahtna than that of a century ago. This ethnography has attempted to avoid this kind of damaging misinterpretation by incorporating available information on contemporary Ahtna life and more recent history.

However, recent perspectives are limited by a lack of available data: there is a need for more ethnographies that depict twenty-first-century Ahtna life. Although there was a smattering of contemporary Ahtna ethnographies during the late twentieth century (e.g., Reckord 1983a; Strong 1972), the past twenty years have seen few, if any, dedicated accounts of modern Ahtna culture. Recent subsistence studies in the region (Holen et al. 2014; Holen et al. 2015; La Vine et al. 2013; La Vine and Zimpelman 2014; Simeone and Kari 2002, 2005) include some ethnographic detail on contemporary subsistence uses and practices.[1] These community-based studies include some discussions of Ahtna culture, but contemporary Ahtna life is not their focus.

This synthesis of existing information on Ahtna ties to sites within the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve (Chapter 8) has drawn heavily from sources such as Kari (2014), Reckord (1983b), West (1973), and the aforementioned de Laguna and McClellan (1954, 1958, 1960) and de Laguna and Guédon (1968) fieldnotes. Simone's earlier work has already brought together much of this information for the Upper (Simeone 2014), Western (URS Alaska 2014), and Lower Ahtna (Simeone n.d.), respectively. The present work should not be considered a complete or definitive documentation of Ahtna habitation in and use of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. There are surely gaps in the information presented here. Some sites are quite culturally sensitive, and Ahtna may be reluctant to discuss them. While this document probably includes most major late-nineteenth-century settlements, Ahtna likely moved throughout most of the non-glaciated land in the park, due to the extensive land base required to make a living hunting and trapping in a boreal forest. Much specific knowledge concerned with topics such as family traditional-use areas is probably lost forever, especially in areas like the Chitina River drainage, where most year-round Ahtna habitation ended by the early twentieth century. As locally available archival sources hopefully become better-organized and more accessible, researchers should survey them and review this chapter for completeness. As new information is found, works discussing Ahtna habitation and use of the park should be updated and synthesized. It may even be worthwhile to produce a comprehensive overview of known historical sites and habitation patterns throughout the Ahtna traditional-use territory. In 2021, AITRC completed a Tribal Stewardship Planning project that included extensive mapping of historical and present-day land use. Much of these data are proprietary, and are available to the public at the discretion of participating tribes.

In addition to building on the documentation of historical ties to the park, there is also a need to understand the resources and sites that are of particular importance to contemporary Ahtna. Much of the more recent ethnographic and social science work on the Ahtna has focused on subsistence issues, such as harvest surveys and traditional knowledge studies related to fish or wildlife. While this work is important and should continue, less is known about contemporary ties that Ahtna people have to places and resources in the park outside of a subsistence context. Documenting those ties would be a fruitful area of research.

Gaining a thorough understanding of the factors that affect Ahtna access to and use of the park would help to better contextualize the information contained in this report and apply it to contemporary issues. The NPS has begun to address this through a separate cooperative project with AITRC, part of which analyzes how changing snow and ice conditions have affected winter access to the park (Miller 2023).

This snow and ice project also represents an encouraging step toward addressing research needs around climate change in the Ahtna region. Currently, there is very little social science data on how climate change is impacting communities and cultures in the Copper River Basin. The Copper River

[1]As of 2024, there is a project underway to conduct comprehensive subsistence surveys in Chistochina and Mentasta Lake, in a collaboration involving the NPS, AITRC, and ADF&G.

Native Association, in collaboration with local Ahtna tribes and the Model Forest Policy Program, has recently written a regional climate-change adaptation plan that will likely be of immense practical use for the communities (Sherwood et al. 2022). Yet climate change raises many issues that a more directed anthropological perspective could greatly illuminate. Similarly, there have been few studies on how climate change is affecting subsistence activities or key plant and animal species in the Copper Basin. The above-mentioned NPS project will be a start toward filling this gap, as it will document traditional knowledge of caribou as well as snow and ice conditions. There is still a vast need for more research, however, given the complexity and immense challenges climate change poses to the region and the Ahtna people.

Climate change has not been the sole driver of changes in human-animal relationships among the Ahtna. The profound social changes described in Chapter 7 have undeniably had an impact on how Ahtna perceive and relate to animals. For example, Ahtna who want to give input into fish and wildlife management must do so on the basis of western science and management practices, not the traditional Ahtna ones outlined in Chapter 5. Further ethnographic research should investigate how decades of this kind of entanglement with colonial management systems – together with other factors such as Christianization and the advent of capitalism – have influenced Ahtna relationships to the animals in their environment (cf. Naves et al. 2015; Raymond-Yakoubian and Angnaboogok 2017). This kind of work is tied to the general political struggle for Indigenous sovereignty and co-management of resources, which has been gaining momentum across many parts of the world during recent decades. As Paul Nadasdy (2003) has shown, there is a power asymmetry inherent in arrangements such as co-management: Indigenous governments must implicitly accept colonial management paradigms and create their own bureaucratic structures that mirror those of colonial agencies. As a result, participating in these kinds of partnerships can potentially erode traditional institutions and social structures within Native communities. Unfortunately, much of this may be inevitable, as any sort of government-to-government relationship (e.g., between tribes and the federal government) will exist in a bureaucratic context, and federal/state governments will always have vastly more power to set the terms of the engagement than any tribe will. Still, as calls grow for tribes to have greater authority to manage natural resources, government agencies should explore whether there are ways of sharing power that do not also greatly increase the administrative burdens placed on tribes. In addition to supporting more research on Ahtna worldviews, the NPS should analyze its own policy structures to identify areas where it might give tribal organizations greater flexibility to manage resources in accordance with their traditional values and ways of seeing the world.

Another key to understanding cultural change, and what it may mean for the future of the Ahtna people, is understanding the attitudes and viewpoints of youth and younger people and their connections to the park. For decades, urbanization has shifted the demography of Alaska Native populations. Today, many young people from the Ahtna region are settling in urban centers such as Anchorage and Fairbanks, but others stay near their home communities in order to remain close to their families and cultural traditions. A study focused on the youth of today (i.e., the 2020s) would be an exciting avenue of study, not only to gain an anthropological perspective on emerging demographic trends, but also to actively engage younger Ahtna as participants in researching their own culture.

Over the long term, engaging Ahtna youth may contribute to future generations of Ahtna playing a more dominant role in researching and disseminating their own culture, as well as in managing the cultural and natural resources of their homelands. The NPS has tried to connect with youth through its involvement in events such as the Batzulnetas culture camp – an annual event that brings together elders, youth, and other tribal members, primarily from the Mentasta Lake area. Camps like this one have the potential to include learning and knowledge exchanges based in both western science and traditional knowledge.

Few Ahtna are employed as anthropologists, biologists, or cultural interpreters in the Copper Basin, either with state and federal agencies (such as NPS) or tribal organizations. Few earn degrees in fields such as anthropology, biology, or resource management. Over the longer term, generating

excitement among youth around these career possibilities may help to create a cadre of Ahtna people who are natural and cultural resource specialists and can contribute to the documentation, management, and interpretation of resources in the Ahtna area.

Research methodologies such as community-based participatory research (Stoecker 2013) are more engaging than traditional social science research, more equitable, and better at addressing community needs. Encouraging this kind of research could help to cultivate more research experience within Copper Basin communities. Events such as the Copper River Basin Symposium, held for the first time in 2020, and sponsored in part by Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve and AITRC, are a good start toward developing local engagement with the natural and social sciences.

Although the authors of this report are both nonnative, the NPS's engagement of an intertribal organization to write this report may represent an effort to give Ahtna people greater agency over telling their own story. In the future, we hope that Ahtna tribal members will be the authors of similar publications. This would help facilitate more direct engagement among the NPS, tribal governments, and the Ahtna people whom they represent.

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APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY

AHTNA WORDS AND PHRASES USED IN THIS TEXT

'Atnahwt'aene	Lower and Central Ahtna, "*'atna* people" or people of the Copper River
ba'	A traditional Ahtna style of dried salmon
ciile	A traditional social class of young Ahtna men who supported their *denae* or *kaskae*
Cilł Hwyaa	"Smart Man," an Ahtna culture hero
c'uniis	Literally "it takes something;" an incurable disease brought about by an animal's spirit due to transgressions against *'engii*.
denae	Literally "person" or "man," an Ahtna political leader who had a territory and an inherited chief's title
'elna	Drudge or slave; a traditional social class
'engii	Used to refer to something that is forbidden, or to refer to the Ahtna system of taboos and proscriptions. *'Engii* is an integral part of the Ahtna worldview; the full idea cannot be easily conveyed in English. For a more detailed discussion of *'engii*, see the "Moral Training" section of Chapter 4.
ghalli	Gifts, such as those given at a potlatch
ghaltsaane	Sometimes called "kolchan" in English accounts, or *keltsaane* in the Mentasta dialect; refers to Dene who are not kin, and specifically, those living along the Tanana and Yukon rivers (Kari 1990, 367)
hwt'aene	"People of a place," or "people who possess an area" – a term used to denote territorial groupings of Ahtna (see, for example, *Hwtsaay Hwt'aene*, below)
hwtiitl' c'eliis	"Sorry songs," written to eulogize the dead at a potlatch
Hwtsaay Hwt'aene	Western Ahtna, "small tree or timber people"
kaskae	An Ahtna leader recognized for his wisdom and ability to settle disputes, but without the same political title and authority of a *denae*; sometimes glossed as "lawyer" by Ahtna people
koht'aene	Person; literally, "one who has a territory"
kuyxi	Marmot
lgheli	A tambourine-style drum, made of moose or caribou skin stretched over a birch frame, used to accompany potlatch songs and dances
Nek'altaenn	Creator or God
Nalbaey	Gull; also refers to the Gull moiety
Netseh Tełyaanen	Another term for *Cilł Hwyaa;* see above
nitsiił	Traditional multifamily semi-subterranean winter house
Saghani	Raven; also refers to the Raven moiety

Saghani Ggaay	Raven, a world-creator and culture hero during mythical times
scele	Younger brother
ses	Safety; protection; luck
Tatl'eahwt'aene	Upper Ahtna, "the headwaters people"
tlaen	Members of one's opposite clan
tseles	Mountain or arctic ground squirrel
'unggadi 'dliis	Potlatch or wealth song, sung before the distribution of gifts at a potlatch'
yenida'a Tah	Old-time stories that take place in a mythical timeframe, often oriented toward educating young people about proper behavior; also referred to as simply *yenida'a*
yiige'	Spirit of an animal

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS USED IN THIS TEXT

ACC—Alaska Commercial Company

AITRC—Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission

ANCSA—Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act

ANILCA—Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act

ADF&G—Alaska Department of Fish and Game

ANB—Alaska Native Brotherhood

BIA—Bureau of Indian Affairs

BLM—Bureau of Land Management

BOG—Alaska Board of Game

CRNA—Copper River Native Association

EO&A—Ethnographic overview and assessment

NPS—National Park Service

RAC—Russian American Company

UAF—University of Alaska Fairbanks

APPENDIX B: ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

This annotated bibliography is a compilation of ethnographic and historical publications and other sources of information reviewed for preparation of the Ahtna EO&A. With a few exceptions, the emphasis was on identifying published and unpublished materials that are generally available to the public and address Ahtna history and culture. Only a few references are included for subject matter considered peripheral to the primary goals of this project, including linguistics and archaeology.

Abercrombie, William R. 1900. Supplementary Expedition into the Copper River Valley, Alaska. In *Compilation of Narratives of Explorations in Alaska***, Senate Report No. 1023, 383–408. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office**.

Abercrombie describes his 1884 expedition to gather detailed information about the Native people in the Copper and Tanana river drainages and to record other information about these areas that would be useful to the military should its presence be needed in the region. This report contains descriptions of the "Copper River Indians" and "Colcharnies" of the upper Copper River area.

Abercrombie, William R. 1900. A Military Reconnaissance of the Copper River Valley, 1898. In *Compilation of Narratives of Explorations in Alaska***, Senate Report No. 1023, 563–590. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office**.

The primary objective of this 1898 expedition was to explore as much of the "Copper River district" as possible between Valdez and the Slana Valley–Mentasta Pass area. Abercrombie estimated that about 300 Native people in four bands ("Tazlena," "Gakona," "Klutena," and "Chettyna") then resided in the Copper River valley. He speaks sympathetically about the Native people in the face of an influx of white people and alcohol, as they endured competition for and a decline in game populations due to the demands of the newcomers.

Ahtna, Inc. 1988. *Report of Investigation: Over-the-Horizon Backscatter Radar System at Gulkana, Alaska, Oral/Ethnohistoric Cultural Studies Program***, two volumes. Prepared for the US Air Force. Copper Center, AK: Ahtna, Inc**.

Under contract to the US Air Force, Ahtna, Inc. conducted research aimed at developing a methodology for obtaining ethnohistorical information about cultural sites located within an area that could be impacted by the proposed Over-the-Horizon (OTH) Backscatter Radar facility near Gulkana. The main report describes the tasks to be performed and summarizes the results. An appendix volume contains transcripts of interviews with Ahtna elders, discusses Ahtna cultural values, and presents recommendations for mitigating impacts to cultural properties. [Note: These documents contain culturally sensitive information, and their distribution and/or reproduction may be restricted under the Code of Federal Regulations, 36 CFR 296.18.]

Ainsworth, Cynthea, Katie John, and Fred John. 2002. *Mentasta Remembers***. Toronto: University of Toronto Press and Mentasta Traditional Council.**

Described by Ainsworth as "more than a family photo album and less than an ethnography," this book combines oral and written history and photographs to produce a short, insightful history of Mentasta Village, an Upper Ahtna village situated near the headwaters of the Copper River.

The potlatch ceremony is described, as are significant accomplishments of the village matriarch, Katie John, who will forever be linked with a court case that extended the federal government's subsistence management jurisdiction into certain navigable waters in Alaska and set the stage for establishment of a culture camp at Batzulnetas. A videotape with the same title as the book and presenting much of the same information was also produced.

Alaska Native Language Center. n.d. Ahtna Language Materials. University of Alaska Fairbanks.

The Alaska Native Language Center research library and archives house a variety of materials on the Ahtna language. These include instructional materials developed by Ahtna Dene speakers and by linguists, including Michael Krauss, Jeff Leer, and Gary Holton.

Allen, Henry T. 1887. *Report of an Expedition to the Copper, Tanana, and Koyukuk Rivers, in the Territory of Alaska, in the Year 1885***. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office.**

Allen's report on his pioneering 1885 expedition contains an early description of Native life in the Ahtna region, not long before sustained Native-nonnative contact began during the gold rush of 1898–1899. Expedition members interacted with Ahtna people regularly and relied on them for food in many instances as they ascended the Copper River during the spring of 1885. Allen's party spent several weeks with the famous *denae* (chief) Nicolai, with whom they traveled from Taral (near present-day Chitina) to the upper Chitina River valley and back. Later, the expedition interacted with other *denae* and groups of Ahtna as they ascended the mainstem of the Copper River before crossing Mentasta Pass.

Allen, Henry T. 1900. A Military Reconnaissance of the Copper River Valley, 1885. In *Compilation of Narratives of Explorations in Alaska,* **Senate Report No. 1023, 411–488. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office.**

This report is essentially a condensed version of Allen's more detailed narrative (Allen 1887) and summarizes his observations of Native people along the Tanana and Yukon rivers. Allen adds some information about wildlife and minerals observed on his trip (see also Fickett 1900).

Austin, Basil. 1968. *The Diary of a Ninety-Eighter***. Mount Pleasant, MI: John Cumming**.

Austin and his companions were lured north to the Klondike Gold Rush by the promises of instant wealth, as were many other adventurous Americans of their generation. This informative diary covers a three-year period from 1897 to 1900 and chronicles the experiences of the Austin party on the trail and while prospecting along the way between Valdez and the Fortymile River area. Reference is made to observations of and interactions with Ahtna and Upper Tanana Dene encountered in both the Copper River basin and the Fortymile region, but not to interactions between these two groups.

Beck, E. J. 1930. *Report of Official Visit to Upper Tanana and Copper River Valleys, Dec. 28, 1929, to Feb. 14, 1930***. Report prepared for the US Department of the Interior, Office of Education, Chief of the Alaska Division, Anchorage. National Archives, RG 75, Alaska Division: General Correspondence Files: Special Cases – John Hajdukovich, Information on Upper Tanana Indians, 1930–32. Washington, DC. [Also available at the Alaska State Library, MS 51, Box 1, Folder 2. Juneau, Alaska].**

Beck's report is written as a letter to J. H. Wagner, Chief of the Alaska Division of the US Department of Education, and is dated March 4, 1930. Beck visited villages and seasonal encampments in the upper Tanana region and upper Copper River basin, where he recorded population numbers, documented serious illnesses, and assessed the feasibility of opening local schools. He sketched the layout of most villages and on graphs portrayed the percent of population that was resident in the village during various months of the year. Beck obtained some information for places he could not visit from Robert McKennan, who was conducting research in Batzulnetas when Beck stopped there.

Bleakley, Geoffrey T. 2007 [1996]. *A History of the Chisana Mining District, Alaska, 1890–1990.* **National Park Service, Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve Resources Report NPS/AFARCR/CRR-96/29. Anchorage: National Park Service, Alaska System Support Office**. **https://www.nps.gov/wrst/learn/historyculture/upload/chisana-mining-district-history.pdf. Accessed 7 December 2023.**

This detailed history of the Chisana Mining District, which originated with the "Chisana Stampede" in 1913, is derived from secondary sources and interviews with people who lived and worked there. Occasional reference is made to the Native population of the Chisana region. Of the 148 residents counted in the 1920 census for the Chisana District, 105 were Alaska Natives. Their first names and ages are recorded in an appendix to the report.

Bleakley, Geoffrey T. 2002. *Contested Ground: An Administrative History of Wrangell–St. Elias National Park and Preserve, Alaska, 1978–2001.* **Anchorage: National Park Service, Alaska System Support Office**.

Bleakley's history includes chapters on major issues that faced the park during its creation and early history, including inholdings, access, subsistence, and mining. There is substantial discussion of how Ahtna interests were involved in advocating for policies related to these issues.

Brewster, Karen. 2018. *For the Love of Freedom: Miners, Trappers, Hunting Guides, and Homesteaders: An Ethnographic Overview and Assessment: Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve.* **Copper Center, AK: Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve.**

Written as part of the same series of EO&As as the present volume and Deur et al. (2015), Brewster's work tells the stories of nonnative settlers who came into present-day Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, beginning at the turn of the twentieth century. She describes how the settlers lived and were able to make a living during these early decades, detailing activities such as homesteading, trapping, mining, and big-game guiding. Although the focus of the work is on nonnative settlers, Brewster pays some attention to the role of Ahtna in these economic activities, discussing, for example, Ahtna big-game guides during the twentieth century.

Brooks, Alfred H. 1900. A Reconnaissance in the White and Tanana River Basins, Alaska, in 1898. In *Explorations in Alaska in 1898. 20th Annual Report of the US Geological Survey, Part 7*, **425–494. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office**.

Brooks was a member of a geological expedition assigned to explore the Lower White River and Tanana River areas during the summer of 1898. He summarizes reports of previous expeditions and records his observations of the region and its inhabitants. Brooks observed the "easy communication" the Upper Tanana Natives from Mansfield Village have with the Copper River Natives.

Brooks, Alfred H. 1901. A Reconnaissance from Pyramid Harbor to Eagle City, Alaska, Including a Description of the Copper Deposits of the Upper White and Tanana Rivers. Extract from the *21st Annual Report of the US Geological Survey, 1899–1900, Part. 2***. 331–391. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office.**

Brooks was a member of an expedition that in the spring of 1899 surveyed the area between Pyramid Harbor on Lynn Canal (near Haines in Southeast Alaska) and Eagle City, by way of the White and Tanana river headwaters. In this report he describes the geography, geology, and Native inhabitants of this area, as well as travel routes to the Tanana and upper White rivers, near the borderlands of Upper Ahtna territory.

Capps, Stephen R. 1915. Mineral Resources of the Chisana-White River District. *In* **Mineral Resources of Alaska: Report on Progress of Investigations in 1914.** *US Geological Survey Bulletin* **622:189–228.**

Mineral resources in the areas on the northeast side of the Wrangell and St. Elias mountains, including parts of the upper basins of the White and Chisana rivers, are the focus of this article. Capps describes seven travel routes to the Chisana–White River district and characterizes the region as being "very sparsely populated with Indians," and limited to a few families living near lower Beaver Creek and to a small settlement on Cross Creek in the Chisana Valley, in the Ahtna–Upper Tanana borderlands.

Capps, Stephen R. *Stephen Reid Capps, Jr., Papers. 1906–1980***. Alaska and Polar Regions Department, University Archives and Manuscript Collections, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.**

Capps had a distinguished career as a USGS geologist in Alaska from 1907 to 1936. Best known for his work in the area that is now Denali National Park and Preserve, Capps also was involved in geological field investigations in the Copper River Basin. Series 7 in this collection contains photograph scrapbooks for the Copper and White River areas in 1908 (Box 9) and the Chisana–White River district in 1914.

Cohen, Kathryn K. 1980. *A History of the Gulkana River.* **Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of Research and Development.**

Cohen presents a natural and cultural history of the Gulkana River as part of a project intended to address questions of its navigability. The first chapter of the report contains descriptions of physical and biological features of the river environment. The report then describes archaeological evidence of early Indigenous settlements, as well as a general overview of Ahtna culture and early contact history. Although Cohen spoke extensively with Copper Basin residents as part of her research, she notes that she was unable to work directly with Ahtna people due to "possible legal implications." Later chapters of the report provide an overview of settlement patterns during the twentieth century.

Crandall, Faye E. 1983. *Into the Copper Valley: The Letters and Ministry of Vincent James Joy, Pioneer Missionary to Alaska.* **New York: Carlton Press.**

Crandall chronicles the missionary work of Rev. Vincent Joy among the Ahtna, mainly through letters and other correspondence. These letters present an important account of Indigenous-

missionary encounters during this time period, as well as of church politics in Alaska. Although the work is dominated by missionary perspectives (a worldview shared by the author herself), there are some quoted passages from Ahtna people, such as where Harry Johns recalls hiding the potlatch ceremony from Joy (p. 125):

> We believe in witchdoctors then; my father was a "Sleep Doctor." In wintertime a fellow from Gakona was the "Medicine Man." We sang songs, use objects from fish or moose. The "Medicine Man" worked people up to chant and emotion. We look out window and see Joy coming. We hid all those things under the chair and just sit there when he come in.

de Laguna, Frederica. 1969–70. The Atna of the Copper River, Alaska: The World of Men and Animals. *Folk* **11–12: 17–26.**

The focus of this article is Ahtna beliefs and customs surrounding animals. De Laguna traces the metaphysical relationships between humans and animals and gives many specific examples of customs (e.g., *'engii*) that arise from these relationships. With the exception of domestic dogs, Ahtna understood all animals to have a set of owners or "bosses" that regulated their behavior and expected respectful treatment from humans. However, de Laguna points out, the treatment expected from humans was especially strict for certain species of animals (e.g., bears, furbearers) and less so with others.

de Laguna, Frederica. 1972. *Under Mount Saint Elias: The History and Culture of the Yakutat Tlingit***, three vols. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press**.

Trade between the Yakutat Tlingit and their neighbors is discussed in Part 1 of this detailed ethnography. The Tlingit traveled regularly to Alaganak (Alakanik), Nuchek, and Cordova, where they visited Eyak relatives and traded with Ahtna people from Taral and Chitina. De Laguna discusses the copper trade with the Ahtna, and how the Kwáashk'i<u>k</u>wáan clan traces its ancestry to Chitina River Ahtna. De Laguna suggests that these relationships may have played a significant role in the establishment of the Alaska Native Brotherhood (ANB) in the Ahtna region: "It may be significant that in 1958, emissaries from the ANB visited Copper Center, claiming relationship by calculating moiety or sib equivalence, and it is here that the first interior branch of the ANB was established" (p. 349).

de Laguna, Frederica, and Marie-Françoise Guédon. 1968. Unpublished fieldnotes, MS 299. On file at Alaska State Library Historical Collections, Juneau, AK, and Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission, Glennallen, AK.

de Laguna, Frederica, and Catharine McClellan. 1954. Unpublished fieldnotes, MS 299. On file at Alaska State Library Historical Collections, Juneau, AK, and Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission, Glennallen, AK.

de Laguna, Frederica, and Catharine McClellan. 1958. Unpublished fieldnotes, MS 299. On file at Alaska State Library Historical Collections, Juneau, AK, and Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission, Glennallen, AK.

de Laguna, Frederica, and Catharine McClellan. 1960. Unpublished fieldnotes, MS 299. On file at Alaska State Library Historical Collections, Juneau, AK, and Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission, Glennallen, AK.

De Laguna and McClellan conducted fieldwork in Ahtna communities during the summers of 1954, 1958, and 1960. In 1968, de Laguna returned for a final field trip, accompanied by her student, Marie-Françoise Guédon. Altogether, the fieldnotes are the single most detailed source of outside information on the Ahtna, containing thousands of pages of information on all aspects of the culture. Much of this is notes and transcriptions from hundreds of interviews with elders. They also contain journals in which the researchers share their personal observations and reflections on their fieldwork.

The fieldnotes contain topical headings within broader sections indicating informants and dates (e.g., Jim McKinley, 6/30/58). However, they are tedious to navigate because of their sheer volume, and Alaska State Library versions have been digitized as non-text PDF files. For this reason, we have begun to index the fieldnotes, along with our own notes on their contents, in a searchable Word file that is available through Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission in Glennallen.

de Laguna, Frederica, and Catharine McClellan. 1981. Ahtna. In *Handbook of North American Indians,* Vol. 6, *Subarctic,* **edited by June Helm, 641–663. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution.**

This article, which seeks to present a comprehensive, topical overview of Ahtna culture, is perhaps the most widely recognized anthropological source on the subject. Although de Laguna and McClellan trace the history of Euro-American colonization and its impact on the Ahtna, their focus is on describing the culture as it existed in the nineteenth century and earlier. General topics discussed include external relations, contact history, interregional trade and trade routes, territoriality, subsistence resources and practices, ritual observances, war, life cycle, potlatching, and cosmology.

Department of the Air Force. 1989. *Environmental Assessment: Proposed Sites, Alaskan Radar System, Over-the-Horizon Backscatter Radar Program*. **Environmental Impact Analysis Process. Finding of No Significant Impact Attached. Hanscomb Air Force Base, MA: Department of the Air Force, Air Force Systems Command, Electronic Systems Division**.

In the 1980s, the US Air Force prepared an environmental impact statement (EIS) pursuant to its proposal to construct and operate an Over-the-Horizon Backscatter (OTH-B) radar system in the Copper River basin and upper Tanana region. This system, the Alaska Radar System, would be one of four OTH-B systems required to establish a surveillance zone around North America to provide early warning of hostile aircraft and cruise missiles approaching the continent. The project would consist of antenna arrays and associated facilities near Gulkana and east of Tok.

Because the EIS did not provide the detail necessary to fully address the potential impacts of this project in the two study areas, the Air Force provided funding for assessments of subsistence uses and cultural resources. The findings of the subsistence studies (Marcotte 1992; McMillan and Cuccarese 1988) and existing information on cultural resources in the study areas are summarized in this Environmental Assessment. Another report included as an appendix (Mishler, Alfonsi, and Bacon 1988) examines qualitative dimensions of subsistence in the two study areas.

Deur, Douglas, Thomas Thornton, Rachel Lahoff, and Jamie Hebert. 2015. *Yakutat Tlingit and Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve: An Ethnographic Overview and Assessment.* **Copper Center, AK: US National Park Service, Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve.**

As part of the same series of EO&As as the present volume, Deur et al. present an overview of Yakutat Tlingit history and culture, with an emphasis on subsistence activities and Tlingit adaptation to socio-cultural change. Included in this volume is an overview of the Kwáashk'i<u>k</u>wáan Clan's history of migration from the Chitina River Valley to the vicinity of Yakutat Bay and Icy Bay. The work draws heavily from the knowledge of oral tradition held by members of the clan in Yakutat.

Easton, Norman A. 2021. *An Ethnohistory of the Chisana River Basin***. Copper Center, AK: US National Park Service, Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve.**

Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve funded this ethnohistorical study of the Native peoples residing in and near the Chisana River basin. Easton draws from his own extensive research in the Alaska-Yukon borderlands and from an array of published and unpublished sources in presenting geological, archaeological, historical, and ethnographic information for the "Upper Tanana Dene" and their homeland. The upper Chisana Basin is often considered Ahtna–Upper Tanana borderlands, so this report can also be seen as a contribution to the ethnography of Upper Ahtna. This volume contains some published and archival sources not reviewed in preparation of this Ahtna EO&A that may be of interest to readers.

Grinev, Andrei V. 1993. On the Banks of the Copper River: The Ahtna Indians and the Russians, 1783–1867. *Arctic Anthropology* **30(1):54–66.**

Grinev provides a detailed account of Ahtna-Russian contact history, describing Russian expeditions in the 1700s and 1800s. He explains that during much of this period, a Russian priority in the region was gaining access to the copper source reputed to be on the Chitina River. Ahtna opposition to this objective was likely a factor in the several instances of deadly conflict between them and Russian exploration parties. The Ahtna enjoyed a position as middlemen in a fur trade between the Russians and other Northern Dene groups, with whom they did not want the Russians to establish direct trade. Grinev notes the dearth of studies on the topic and concludes that extant literature is simplistic in its portrayal of Russian contact influence on the Ahtna.

Grinev, Andrei V. 1997. The Forgotten Expedition of Dmitrii Tarkhanov on the Copper River. *Alaska History* **12(1):1–17.**

Dmitrii Tarkhanov was little-known among twentieth-century historians until Grinev came across a scientific paper he had written. Tarkhanov's journal is the earliest-known account of European travel on the Copper River, a journey he undertook in 1796. Tarkhanov stayed several months at the mouth of Fox Creek, near present-day Chitina. Grinev provides an overview of the ethnographic observations Tarkhanov made in his journal.

Hadleigh-West, Frederick, and William B. Workman. 1970. *A Preliminary Archeological Evaluation of the Southern Part of the Route of the Proposed Trans-Alaska Pipeline System: Valdez to Hogan's Hill.* **Anchorage: Alaska Methodist University.**

This report describes archaeological sites in a significant transect of Ahtna territory. It contains an ethnographic overview of the Ahtna, although most of the information is quite general, and it contains some inaccuracies.

Hanable, William S. 1982. *Alaska's Copper River: The 18th and 19th Centuries*. **Anchorage: Alaska Historical Society for the Alaska Historical Commission.**

This concise history of the Copper River Basin focuses heavily on Euro-American exploration and contact history, with some very limited ethnographic information on Ahtna culture as it was during pre-contact times. A section titled "Aboriginal Inhabitants" (pp. 10–14) gives a brief overview of some facets of Ahtna culture, including trade between the Ahtna and their southern neighbors, settlements and houses, and a very general seasonal round. Other references to the Ahtna are primarily in terms of their encounters with Russian and American exploration parties.

Hayes, Charles W. 1892. An Expedition through the Yukon District. *National Geographic Magazine* **4:117–162**.

The author of this publication, Charles Hayes, was the geologist on Frederick Schwatka's 1891 expedition to explore portions of the Yukon Basin, including areas north of the St. Elias Mountains. This paper is the text of a presentation he made to the National Geographic Society and summarizes "the main facts of scientific interest observed during the journey" (p. 118). The introductory section includes brief descriptions of the travel route and of Native people the expedition encountered.

Haynes, Terry and Simeone, William E. 2007. *Upper Tanana Ethnographic Overview and Assessment, Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve.* **Technical Paper No. 325. Anchorage: Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Subsistence.**

This paper was written as part of the same series of Wrangell-St. Elias ethnographic overviews and assessments as the present volume. Haynes and Simeone present an overview of Upper Tanana Dene culture, with a focus on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The range of ethnographic topics covered in this report is generally similar to that in the present volume. This work contains extensive discussions of connections between Ahtna and Upper Tanana Dene, providing considerable detail on Upper Ahtna living at the borderlands and the exchange and interdependence between the two groups.

Higgins, Margot N. 2015. *From Copper to Conservation: The Politics of Wilderness, Cultural, and Natural Resources in Wrangell-Saint Elias National Park and Preserve.* **Ph.D. dissertation in Environmental Science, Policy, and Management, University of California, Berkeley.**

Higgins asserts that ANILCA contains provisions that allow people to continue living and harvesting subsistence resources in wilderness areas of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park – a circumstance that she says is unique to Alaska. The perspectives of both Alaska Native and nonnative residents of private lands within the boundaries of the park and surrounding communities are considered here, as are those of National Park Service and other agency staff. During the course of the park's history, Higgins suggests that the NPS has gradually become more sensitive to the needs of relative newcomers (e.g., tourism operators), giving these groups greater political power compared to Alaska Native people living in and around the park. Higgins explores the narratives different groups in and around the park use to explain their histories with and presence in the Wrangell-St. Elias area, and examines how these narratives have changed over time. In many cases, these narratives represent oversimplifications of a complex social-ecological picture. Higgins recommends that resource managers try to "build their understanding of how to manage the system based on a greater attentiveness to the interaction of particular narratives at local, national and global scales" (p. 120).

Holen, Davin L. 2004. The Atna' and the Political Ecology of the Copper River Fishery, Alaska. *Arctic Anthropology* **41(1):58–70.**

Holen examines how the Atna' [Ahtna] have used their knowledge of the environment to articulate a specific claim to subsistence salmon fishing in the Copper River. Holen summarizes the history of salmon fishing regulations and then presents three case studies to illustrate Atna' use of traditional ecological knowledge to support their claims. One example is the landmark *Katie John* case, in which elder Native women from Mentasta and Dot Lake were victorious in their efforts to have subsistence fishing reinstated at the now-abandoned village of Batzulnetas on Tanada Creek.

Hunt, William R. 1991. *Mountain Wilderness: Historic Resource Study for Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve.* **Anchorage: National Park Service, Alaska Region.**

Hunt's historical study of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve largely focuses on Euro-American colonization and settlement. The work contains a brief overview of Ahtna history and culture that draws mostly from well-known sources such as de Laguna and McClellan (1981). It also contains a synopsis of the Allen (1887) expedition.

Justin, Wilson. 2005. ATV Noise Drowns Out the Songs of the Trails. *Anchorage Daily News,* **August 7**.

Justin, a Northern Dene and a lifelong resident of the Ahtna–Upper Tanana borderlands, discusses Native trails in that area and how their use has changed during his lifetime. He describes the effects of technology and a changing world on traditional Northern Dene practices.

Kari, James. 1977. Linguistic Diffusion between Ahtna and Tanaina. *International Journal of American Linguistics* **43:274–289.**

Kari argues that contact between Upper [Cook] Inlet Tanaina (Dena'ina) and the western Ahtna has been very close and has likely taken place for centuries. The two groups shared certain cultural features that were not found among other groups of Dena'ina. Their trading relationship has been well-documented, and many members of each had passive knowledge of the other group's language. One Ahtna band, the Mountain People of the Talkeetna River, included members of mixed Ahtna-Dena'ina ancestry. There are a number of shared place names in the Athna-Dena'ina borderlands. The clan-moiety systems of the two groups provide further evidence of contact between the two groups, and most Upper Inlet Dena'ina have kinship ties to the Ahtna. Kari argues that cultural features such as the Dena'ina potlatch system originally came from the Ahtna.

Kari, James, editor.1986. *Tatl'ahwt'aenn Nenn': The Headwaters People's Country, Narratives of the Upper Ahtna Athabaskans.* **Fairbanks: Alaska Native Language Center.**

This collection of twenty-one Upper Ahtna narratives focuses on major events in pre-contact Upper Ahtna history (fifteen narratives) and on traditional Ahtna territory, emphasizing Native place names, trail systems, and land use in the early twentieth century (six narratives). None of the stories are mythical *yenida'a* tales: instead, they focus on specific historical events and travel narratives. Specific topics include customs (e.g., hunting and fishing practices, a traditional potlatch), traditional chiefs, histories of armed conflicts, Euro-American contact history, and descriptions of travel routes. The text is in Ahtna, with English translations beneath each line.

Kari, James. 1990. *Ahtna Athabaskan Dictionary*. **Fairbanks: Alaska Native Language Center.**

This is the most comprehensive listing of Ahtna-language words to be published, and the first dictionary of a Northern Dene language to include a complete, comprehensive listing of morphemes (i.e., the smallest units of meaning within words). The main body is Ahtna to English, with an index at the end of English-to-Ahtna word translations.

Kari, James. 2010. *Ahtna Travel Narratives: A Demonstration of Shared Geographic Knowledge among Alaska Athabascans*. **Fairbanks: Alaska Native Language Center.**

The narratives in this book are detailed descriptions of the trails and routes that Ahtna traditionally used to move between different parts of their homeland. Each one conveys a wealth of geographic information, referencing dozens of Ahtna place names. Altogether, there are five different narratives told by Ahtna elders Jim McKinley, Frank Stickwan, Jake Tansy, Katie John, and Adam Sanford. Each is told in Ahtna, accompanied by an English translation.

Kari, James. 2011. A Case Study in Ahtna Athabascan Geographic Knowledge. In *Landscape in Language: Transdisciplinary Perspectives*, **edited by D. M. Mark, A. G. Turk, N. Burenhult and D. Stea, 239–260. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.**

Language-based geographic knowledge systems have been documented more extensively for Ahtna than for most Northern Dene languages, and as such can be used to understand general features of the language family. The Ahtna language has a complex naming structure that enabled travelers to remember hundreds of place names. These names, in turn, provided geographic knowledge that assisted Ahtna travelers. The Ahtna naming system includes many structural features that are widespread within the Na-Dene language family, to the extent that it could be used among neighboring groups speaking different dialects and languages. For example, a large percentage of Ahtna place names are constructed from nominalized verbs based on only a few suffixes (e.g., the ending –y is glossed as "the one that") – a pattern common in other Northern Dene languages as well. Kari also gives an overview of Ahtna's directional system – which is organized around the Copper River – and how it facilitated navigation.

Kari, James. 2014. *Ahtna Place Names Lists***, Version 3.3. Fairbanks: Alaska Native Language Center.**

Kari attempts to provide a definitive listing of Ahtna place names within Ahtna traditional territory and beyond. The names are sequenced geographically, with those on the Copper River beginning at the mouth of the river and ending at the headwaters. Each entry contains geographic coordinates, the meaning or translation of the Ahtna name, the English name, and citations of sources where the place was referenced. Narrative information about the places is not included.

Kari, James, and James Fall, editors. 2016 [2003]. *Shem Pete's Alaska: The Territory of the Upper Cook Inlet Dena'ina*. **Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press.**

Based on extensive oral history work with Shem Pete, an Upper Inlet Dena'ina man who was born in 1896, this volume conveys Shem Pete's extensive geographic knowledge of his traditional territory, which includes the western borderlands of the Ahtna and significant portions of the western Ahtna homeland. Based on narratives by Pete and other traditional knowledge-bearers, the work describes the Upper Matanuska River, the Tyone Lake area, and other parts of the upper Susitna Basin. One chapter focuses on the Mountain People, a mixed Ahtna-Dena'ina band living

in the Talkeetna River basin. However, places described in this volume do not extend into the Copper River basin.

Kari, James, and Siri Tuttle. 2005. *Copper River Native Places: A Report on Culturally Important Places to Alaska Native Tribes in Southcentral Alaska*. **Bureau of Land Management Alaska Technical Report No. 56. Anchorage: US Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management.**

This report identifies sources of Ahtna, Eyak, and Tlingit geographic place names information in areas covered by the Bureau of Land Management's East Alaska Resource Management Plan. Kari's and Tuttle's discussion highlights significant features of Ahtna culture as it relates to geography and language. For instance, the compilation of narratives and place names has been used to precisely define the boundaries of the Ahtna homeland and the territorial divisions within it. Kari and Tuttle also give an overview of nine Ahtna elders whose extensive travel made them experts on place names. They discuss general features of the geographic naming system, such as how it designates sacred sites and other cultural features. Topics discussed include clan origin locations, subsistence harvest rules and practices, and the trail and travel-route system. Kari and Tuttle argue that Ahtna used lands west of the Copper River more intensively than they used lands on the east side (i.e., those now in the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park), and that this is demonstrated by a greater density of place names on the west side.

Kari, James, and Siri Tuttle, editors. 2018. *Yenida'a Tah, Ts'utsaede, K'adiide: Mythical Times, Ancient Times, Recent Times: An Anthology of Ahtna Narratives*. **Fairbanks: Alaska Native Language Center.**

Kari and Tuttle have compiled two dozen narratives, presented in Ahtna and in English translation, selected by Ahtna elders over the years. The stories are divided into two broad categories: *yenida'a* are mythic tales that do not include specific references to geographic places, while other tales (*ts'utsaede*, "in ancient times;" *k'adiide*, "in the recent past") narrate historical events, describe traditional practices, and sometimes teach values.

Ketz, James A. 1983. *Paxson Lake: Two Nineteenth Century Ahtna Sites in the Copper River Basin, Alaska.* **Occasional Paper No. 33. Fairbanks: Cooperative Park Studies Unit, University of Alaska, Fairbanks**.

As background to this examination of two archaeological sites at Paxson Lake, Ketz briefly discusses the "Gulkana Indians" who reside in the area. Artifact assemblages at both sites date from the nineteenth century and reflect changes in Ahtna trade and technology that were beginning to take place. By comparison with Ahtna winter villages, Ketz concludes that both sites played a narrower role in the Ahtna seasonal round, functioning primarily as caribou-hunting camps.

Kukkonen, Malla, and Garrett Zimpelman. 2012. *Subsistence Harvests and Uses of Wild Resources in Chistochina, Alaska, 2009*. **Technical Paper No. 370. Anchorage: Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Subsistence.**

This technical paper presents the results of a comprehensive community harvest survey conducted in Chistochina, in which researchers quantified each subsistence resource households in the community harvested or used during that study year (2009). It also contains some ethnographic information on local subsistence harvests, uses and practices, as well as a brief community history.

La Vine, Robbin, Malla Kukkonen, Bronwyn Jones, and Garrett Zimpelman. 2013. *Subsistence Harvests and Uses of Wild Resources in Copper Center, Slana/Nabesna Road, Mentasta Lake, and Mentasta Pass, Alaska, 2010.* **Technical Paper No. 380. Anchorage: Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Subsistence.**

This technical paper presents the results of a comprehensive community harvest survey conducted in the four study communities. Researchers quantified each subsistence resource the communities harvested or used during 2010. The publication also contains ethnographic information on local subsistence harvests, uses and practices, as well as short community histories.

La Vine, Robbin, and Garrett Zimpelman. 2014. *Subsistence Harvests and Uses of Wild Resources in Kenny Lake/Willow Creek, Gakona, McCarthy, and Chitina, Alaska, 2012.* **Technical Paper No. 394. Anchorage. Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Subsistence.**

This technical paper presents the results of a comprehensive community harvest survey conducted in the four study communities. Researchers quantified each subsistence resource the communities harvested or used during 2012. The publication also contains ethnographic information on local subsistence harvests, uses and practices, as well as short community histories.

Lethcoe, Jim, and Nancy Lethcoe. 1996. *Valdez Gold Rush Trails of 1898–99***. Valdez, AK: Prince William Sound Books.**

The authors use secondary sources to describe the gold rush history of Valdez, which includes some information about the Ahtna and the impacts they experienced consequent to the influx of prospectors and other travelers in the late 1800s. Recurring themes noted in the historic accounts referenced by the authors are the generosity of the Ahtna people and the white prejudices toward Native people prevalent at the time.

McClellan, Catharine. 1975. *My Old People Say: An Ethnographic Survey of Southern Yukon Territory*, 2 **parts. Ottawa: National Museum of Man, Publications in Ethnology.**

This ethnography of three Indigenous groups living in southern Yukon Territory – the Southern Tutchone, Tagish, and Inland Tlingit – is based primarily on fieldwork McClellan conducted there in 1948–1951. The territory of the Southern Tutchone borders that of the Upper Tanana/Ahtna borderlands in Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. McClellan discusses the Copper Chief, a powerful Southern Tutchone or Upper Tanana man in the upper White River drainage who controlled the copper trade in the White/Chisana/upper Copper River area.

McMillan, Patricia O., and Sal V. Cuccarese. 1988. *Alaska Over-the-Horizon Backscatter Radar System: Characteristics of Contemporary Subsistence Use Patterns in the Copper River Basin and Upper Tanana Area.* Vol. I: *Synthesis* and Vol. II: *Appendices***. Prepared for Hart Crowser, Inc., Seattle, WA. Arctic Environmental Information and Data Center (AEIDC), University of Alaska Anchorage**.

This report summarizes existing information on subsistence practices in the upper Tanana Valley and Copper River basin and includes the preliminary findings of collaborative fieldwork conducted in 1987–88 in the upper Tanana region by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), the National Park Service, and the Arctic Environmental Information and Data Center (AEIDC). Data for Copper Basin communities are derived from ADF&G research conducted

there in the early 1980s. This project was designed in part to provide information required to evaluate the potential effects of the proposed Backscatter Radar System on subsistence patterns and to assess historic and contemporary uses of thirteen specific areas within the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve.

Mendenhall, W. C., and F. C. Schrader. 1903. *The Mineral Resources of the Mount Wrangell District, Alaska.* **US Geological Survey Professional Paper No. 15, pp. 1–71**. **Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office.**

This report resembles that of most geological survey papers for this period. Some information is presented concerning Native groups and travel routes (some of which are depicted on a foldout map) in the Copper River basin and upper Tanana region, but this is secondary to the descriptions of the geology and mineral resources in the Mount Wrangell District.

Miller, Odin. 2023. Traditional Knowledge of Changes in Winter Conditions in Alaska's Copper River Basin. *Alaska Park Science* **22(1):12–15.**

Based on a set of interviews conducted with trappers and other local/traditional knowledge holders in the Copper River Basin, this work explores changes observed in snow and ice conditions and their effect on traditional activities such as trapping. Interviews were conducted with both Dene and nonnative respondents. The work contains limited ethnographic detail on the Ahtna, but does include descriptions of trapping and winter transportation during the mid-to-late twentieth century as well as more recently. There is also discussion on how socio-economic changes have interacted with changing snow and ice conditions in the region, as well as on how winter use of lands that are now Wrangell-St. Elias National Park have changed since the early-mid 20th century.

Mishler, Craig, and William E. Simeone, editors. 2006. *Tanana and Chandalar: The Alaska Field Journals of Robert A. McKennan***. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press**.

Robert McKennan's field journals offer important insights into his fieldwork among the Upper Tanana and Gwich'in and the challenges of conducting ethnographic research in remote areas of interior Alaska in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Mishler (Gwich'in) and Simeone (Upper Tanana) have performed an important service for researchers by assembling this material, augmenting the journals with a biographical sketch of McKennan and providing other contextual information. McKennan's Upper Tanana journals contain important insights about life in the Chisana, Nabesna, and Slana areas in the 1920s, in the borderlands of traditional Ahtna territory, and near the northern border of what is now the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve.

Mishler, Craig, John Alfonsi, and Glenn Bacon. 1988. *Alaska Over-the-Horizon Backscatter Radar System: Cultural and Traditional Aspects of Subsistence***. Research Summary Report Provided to the US Air Force. Prepared for Hart Crowser, Inc., Seattle, WA and Anchorage, AK: Ahtna-Tanacross Association.**

Included as Appendix B to the "Department of the Air Force 1989" Environmental Assessment cited above, this report examines the importance and qualitative dimensions of subsistence to the predominantly Northern Dene communities in the Tok, Tanacross, and Gulkana areas and complements the survey data reported in other subsistence studies conducted in conjunction with this environmental review (e.g., Marcotte 1992; McMillan and Cuccarese 1988). The authors

interviewed long-time residents, and summarized traditional subsistence territories. Similarities in cultural beliefs and practices between the Upper Tanana and Ahtna people are described, as are kinship connections between the two regions.

Moffit, Fred H. 1933. The Suslota Pass District, Upper Copper River Region, Alaska. *US Geological Survey Bulletin* **844-C:137–162. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office.**

This US Geological Survey report includes brief descriptions of the Native and white populations in the Batzulnetas and Slana areas, and of travel routes between the upper Copper River basin and Tetlin.

Moffit, Fred H. 1936. The Upper Copper and Tanana Rivers. *US Geological Survey Bulletin* **868-C:136–143. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office**.

Topographic and geologic field parties surveyed the section of the Alaska Range between the Nabesna and Big Tok rivers in 1934. This report contains no information about the people living in this area. A sketch map included with the report depicts the Eagle Trail running south along the Tok River to Mentasta and then to Slana, with one loop circling back to another point on the Tok River.

Moffit, Fred H. 1938. Geology of the Slana-Tok District, Alaska. *US Geological Survey Bulletin* **904. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office.**

Moffit describes the Slana-Tok District as "extending from Mount Kimball southeastward to the Tetling River and including streams that are tributary to the Copper River on the south and to the Tanana River on the north" (p. 2). He summarizes the history of exploration in the area and describes trails and travel routes. Reference is made to Indian trails, but no other information is presented about Native peoples in the area.

Moffit, Fred H. 1941. Geology of the Upper Tetling River District Alaska. *US Geological Survey Bulletin* **917-B:115–157. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office.**

The geology of a part of the Alaska Range located in the headwater region of the Tanana and Copper rivers is described in this report. The history of previous geological investigations in the area is summarized, and Moffit describes routes and trails in the area.

Moffit, Fred H 1943. Geology of the Nutzotin Mountains, Alaska. *US Geological Survey Bulletin* **933-B:103–199.**

This geologic investigation focused on the northeast side of the Nutzotin Mountains between the Chisana River and the Canadian border, and included geologic mapping of the valleys of Cooper, Notch, and Cross creeks, located between the Nabesna and Chisana rivers. Moffit describes travel routes and trails in the area, including Indigenous ones, but otherwise, the Native inhabitants of this region are not discussed.

Moffit, Fred H., and Knopf, Alfred. 1909. Mineral Resources of the Nabesna-White River District. *US Geological Survey Bulletin* **379:161–180. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office.**

The authors conducted topographic and geologic fieldwork in the summer of 1908 south of the upper Tanana region, on the northeastern slope of the Wrangell Mountains and the adjacent Nutzotin Mountains. Three Indian villages with an estimated population of forty-five to fifty

inhabitants were then located in this area: Batzulnetas, on the Copper River; an unnamed village on the Nabesna River at the mouth of Cooper Creek; and an unnamed village on Cross Creek opposite the mouth of Notch Creek in the Chisana Valley. Due in part to their isolation, Moffit and Knopf considered the Chisana Indians to be more independent than those at Batzulnetas and Nabesna and said they "have retained their own manner of living to a greater extent" (p. 166). The Indians in all three villages wore western clothing and Native-made moccasins, and were eager to trade for tea and tobacco. [In contrast, a version of this report published in 1910 in *USGS Bulletin* 417, contained a more negative description of the Indians, stating that they were "inveterate beggars, always asking for tea or tobacco, for which, as well as for flour and cloth, they will trade meat and leather goods, when they have them" (p. 15).]

Moodie, D. Wayne, A. J. W. Catchpole, and Kerry Abel. 1992. Northern Athapaskan Oral Traditions and the White River Volcano. *Ethnohistory* **39(2):148–172**.

This article discusses Northern Dene oral traditions regarding a volcano that erupted in the upper White River basin of Alaska circa AD 720 and deposited ash that covered most of the southwestern Yukon Territory. The authors note that the prevailing hypothesis is that this ash fall negatively impacted the resources on which ancestral Dene people depended, causing them to migrate and disperse into different groups with distinct languages. With little archaeological evidence for the impacts of ash fall on migration, the authors look to Dene oral traditions about past volcanism, noting that "some of these traditions describe an eruption as having led to the formation of certain northern Athapaskan nations and to the differentiation of their languages" (p. 149). Based on these sources, Moodie et al. conclude that the migration of Dene peoples eastward into the Mackenzie River valley likely occurred as a result of this ash fall. The presence of trade networks (for copper and European goods) involving the Upper Tanana, Ahtna, and other Native groups in the Alaska-Yukon borderlands is acknowledged.

National Park Service. 1999. Information Regarding the Addition of Healy Lake as a Resident Zone Community for Wrangell-St. Elias National Park. Prepared for the Wrangell-St. Elias Subsistence Resource Commission, April 1999.

This report is a synthesis of public testimony, oral interviews with residents of Healy Lake and other upper Tanana River and Copper River basin communities, as well as published and unpublished sources. It documents use by these communities of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve for subsistence purposes and was prepared in support of a proposal to add Healy Lake to the park resident zone. Customary and traditional use of the park by Healy Lake residents in part reflects the fact that some community members have familial connections to the Ahtna.

Naves, Liliana C., William E. Simeone, Marie E. Lowe, Erica McCall Valentine, Gloria Stickwan, and James Brady. 2015. Cultural Consensus on Salmon Fisheries and Ecology in the Copper River, Alaska. *Arctic* **68(2):210–22.**

This article presents the results of a study that was conducted among three different groups of contemporary Copper River fisheries stakeholders: Prince William Sound commercial fishers, upriver Ahtna fishers, and biologists/managers. The authors administered a survey to members of each of the groups and used cultural consensus analysis to "assess similarities and differences in knowledge (understanding gained through experience or academic study) and opinions (what people have realized to be true or false in the course of their daily lives) of Ahtna, commercial

fishers, and managers and biologists." Their results showed that there was strong agreement between commercial fishers and managers/biologists on the vast majority of the propositions that were given in the survey. While all three groups agreed on a significant number of propositions, there were few questions on which the Ahtna agreed with one group but not the other. In this way, this article suggests that some differences in worldview continue to exist between Ahtna culture and that of the nonnative stakeholder groups.

Powell, Addison M. 1997 [1909]. *Trailing and Camping in Alaska***. Abridged version. Preface by Jim and Nancy Lethcoe. Valdez, AK: Prince William Sound Books.**

Originally published in 1909, this account of Powell's travels in the Copper River region includes some insightful observations about the Ahtna and neighboring Upper Tanana Dene. Powell was a surveyor and adventurer who ventured north for the Klondike Gold Rush in 1898 and remained in Alaska intermittently until 1907. He was a deputy surveyor on Abercrombie's Copper River exploring expedition from 1898 to 1900, and later prospected and hunted in the Chisana and Valdez areas.

Pratt, Kenneth L. 1998. Copper, Trade, and Tradition among the Lower Ahtna of the Chitina River Basin: The Nicolai Era, 1884–1900. *Arctic Anthropology* **35(2):77–98.**

This article traces the history of the copper trade in the Chitina River Basin and the changes that resulted from Euro-American contact during the late nineteenth century. Pratt suggests that up until the early nineteenth century, contact with Europeans did not significantly alter Ahtna material culture. However, by the late 1800s, the availability of European metals began causing Ahtna copper to decline in importance. Pratt also discusses the history of Chief Nicolai and the Euro-American explorers who attempted to ascertain the source of copper on the Chitina River from him.

Reckord, Holly. 1979. *A Case Study of Copper Center, Alaska.* **Technical Report no 7. Anchorage: US Bureau of Land Management, Alaska Outer Continental Shelf Office**.

Reckord describes sociocultural changes that occurred in the Ahtna community of Copper Center during construction of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System in 1973–1978. This ethnographic and ethnohistorical overview also describes the subsistence patterns of Copper River basin communities affiliated with Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve and the effects of change agents such as missionaries and the fur trade. It is based primarily on research conducted in the 1970s before the park was created.

Reckord, Holly. 1983. *That's the Way We Live: Subsistence in the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve***. Anthropology and Historic Preservation, Cooperative Park Studies Unit, Occasional Paper no. 34. University of Alaska, Fairbanks**.

Aboriginal and contemporary subsistence patterns in communities around the newly established Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve are described in this report, which is based on a literature review and interviews conducted by the author in the late 1970s. Reckord gives a detailed description of the Ahtna seasonal round and a history of subsistence patterns in what is now the park. Although much of the work is focused on historical use of subsistence resources, it gives some detail on then-contemporary subsistence activities.

Reckord, Holly. 1983. *Where Raven Stood: Cultural Resources of the Ahtna Region*. **Anthropology and Historic Preservation, Cooperative Park Studies Unit, Occasional Paper no. 35. Fairbanks: University of Alaska, Fairbanks**.

As a preamble to her inventory of historical and cemetery sites in the Ahtna region, Reckord summarizes relevant ethnohistorical and ethnographic information based on research she conducted beginning in the mid-1970s. The focus of this work is on cataloging known sites throughout the Ahtna traditional-use area. Ahtna, Inc., which was involved in the study, directed Reckord to focus on sites outside of the areas already selected by Ahtna villages under ANCSA. In contrast to some archaeological site inventories (e.g., West 1973), Reckord's work provides lengthy discussions of many sites for which substantial information is known, such as Hogan's Hill and Valdez Creek. These discussions often include considerable historical and ethnographic content.

Remington, Charles H. [Copper River Joe]. 1939. *A Golden Cross on Trails from the Valdez Glacier.* **Los Angeles, CA: White-Thompson.**

Charles Remington, aka Copper River Joe, traveled to the Copper valley via the route over the Valdez Glacier as part of the 1898 stampede. His account contains detailed descriptions of life among the large encampments of prospectors at Klutina Lake during the time period. Occasional descriptions of Ahtna are interspersed with the narrative. Copper River Joe notes that the Klutina Lake area is "Chief Stickwan's hunting grounds," and elsewhere describes a sheep hunt in the Wrangell Mountains with Chief Billum. He reports the pressure that the outsiders were placing on fish and wildlife populations, and the urgent concern the Ahtna expressed over this.

Rice, John F. 1900. From Valdez to Eagle City. In *Compilation of Narratives of Explorations in Alaska*, **Senate Report no. 1023, 784–789. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office**.

The Rice expedition traveled from Valdez to Eagle City and back to Valdez between June and August 1899. His account includes descriptions of both Ahtna and Upper Tanana Natives at the turn of the twentieth century and contains descriptions of local understandings of territoriality.

Rogers, Randall R. 1991. *An Analysis of Eligibility for Subsistence Hunting in the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park, Alaska*. **M.S. thesis, School of Agriculture and Land Resources Management, University of Alaska Fairbanks.**

This study of the methods used for establishing eligibility for subsistence hunting in Wrangell-St. Elias National Park was motivated by concerns about population growth in local communities and its potential effects on conservation of park resources. Rogers details the legal framework guiding subsistence uses in national parks in Alaska, reviews management of subsistence hunting in Wrangell-St. Elias National Park from its establishment through June 1990, and analyzes subsistence harvest data for the park area. He also summarizes the views of local Native and nonnative subsistence users and of one representative of the conservation community, based on personal interviews conducted in 1989. Finally, Rogers presents a series of conclusions and recommendations concerning future management of subsistence in the park.

Rohn, Oscar. 1900. Copper River Exploring Expedition: An Expedition into the Mount Wrangell Region. In *Compilation of Narratives of Explorations in Alaska***, 790–803. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office**.

The Rohn party was charged with making a general topographic reconnaissance map of the Wrangell Mountains area and studying the geologic and mineral resources to the extent possible. Some travel routes in the Copper Basin are described, as are interactions of expedition members with Ahtna.

Rohn, Oscar. 1900. Copper River Exploring Expedition: Trails and Routes. In *Compilation of Narratives of Explorations in Alaska***, 780–784. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office**.

Rohn describes trails in the area between Valdez and the Tanana River, including several in the Batzulnetas–Mentasta Lake–Nabesna area, for the purpose of identifying travel routes that would facilitate investigation and development of mineral resources in the interior. Included are brief descriptions of some "old Indian trails" that connected Ahtna villages in the Ahtna–Upper Tanana borderlands area.

Rohn, Oscar. 1900. Report of Oscar Rohn on Exploration in Wrangell Mountain District. In *Alaska, 1899, Copper River Exploring Expedition***, edited by Captain W. R. Abercrombie, 105–130. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office**.

In this report Rohn describes the geography and mineral resources of the Copper River basin, occasionally referencing and adding to the observations of earlier explorers in the area. He notes that "Indians on the Nabesna [River] had bullets, knives, and arrow points made of native copper" obtained at four different places including a tributary of the White River and farther west on the headwaters of the Tanana and Nabesna rivers. As he does in his other expedition reports, Rohn describes the routes traveled, many of which were Indian trails. Rohn persuaded Indians encountered on the Nabesna River to guide the expedition to Batzulnetas.

Shinkwin, Anne D. 1979. *Dakah Denin's Village and the Dixthada Site: A Contribution to Northern Athapaskan Prehistory.* **Archaeological Survey of Canada Paper no. 91. Ottawa: National Museums of Canada**.

Archaeological remains from two late prehistoric/early historic sites in east central Alaska are described in this report. Dakah Denin's village site on the Copper River is an early nineteenth-century Ahtna village. The Dixthada site near Mansfield Lake in the upper Tanana valley has both late prehistoric and later prehistoric/early historic components, the most recent of which represents Upper Tanana Dene occupation. Similarities in these two sites are identified and include shared copper toolmaking and subsistence technologies and a shared adaptive strategy to the subarctic boreal forest environment. General archaeological, historical, and ethnographic data for the Ahtna and Upper Tanana Dene are included in the publication.

Simeone, William E. 2002. *Wild Resource Harvests and Uses by Residents of Cantwell, Alaska, 2000***. Technical Paper 272. Juneau: Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Subsistence.**

This technical paper presents the results of a comprehensive community harvest survey conducted in Cantwell, in which researchers quantified each subsistence resource the community harvested during the year 2000. The paper contains ethnographic information on local subsistence harvests, uses and practices, as well as a brief community history.

Simeone, William E. 2006. *Some Ethnographic and Historical Information on the Use of Large Land Mammals in the Copper River Basin.* **Cultural Resources Report NPS/AR/CRR-2006-56. Copper Center, AK: National Park Service, Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve.**

Drawing extensively from traditional knowledge and historical sources, this report provides a natural history of different species' abundance and distribution in the Copper Basin during the past 100 to 150 years. It tracks the temporal and spatial variation in the relative use and importance of each species to Ahtna and other Native peoples who have used the area. Human predator control activities are another focus of discussion, as are "traditional" Ahtna hunting practices (*ca*. the turn of the twentieth century), technology, spiritual dimensions, and food processing/preparation. One notable conclusion Simeone draws is that moose used to be quite scarce in much of the region, and grew in importance during the twentieth century, while Dall sheep were historically very abundant at some times in the past and were a major food source for some Ahtna.

Simeone, William E. 2009. Nataełde, "Roasted Salmon Place": A Summary History of Batzulnetas. In *Chasing the Dark: Perspectives on Place, History and Alaska Native Land Claims***, edited by Kenneth L. Pratt. Anchorage: US Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs.**

As part of a compilation volume of scholarship based on ANCSA 14(h)(1) land claims, Simeone's chapter presents an overview of the rich cultural history associated with Nataełde, or Batzulnetas. Ahtna oral history of the site extends back to pre-contact times, and describes a famous Ahtna-Russian conflict, Lt. Allen's travels through the region, and well-known chiefs in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. More recently, subsistence fishing at Nataełde became the focus of the Katie John case. Simeone notes that the 14(h)(1) archaeological excavations at the site revealed more than 500 cultural features.

Simeone, William E. 2014. *Along the Ałs'e'tnaey-Nal'cine Trail: Historical Narratives, Historical Places.* **Chistochina, AK: Mt. Sanford Tribal Consortium.**

This report provides histories of Indigenous settlements within the upper Copper, Nabesna, Chisana, and White river drainages. The focus is on the connection of families associated with the modern-day community of Chistochina – specifically, their use of lands that are part of present-day Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. Simeone inventories settlements and habitation sites in the region, giving detailed descriptions and lengthy quotes from elders with connections to specific places.

Simeone, William E. 2018. *Ahtna: Netseh Dae' Tkughit'e' "Before Us, It Was Like This."* **Glennallen, AK: Ahtna, Inc.**

Simeone wrote this volume under the direction and guidance of a committee of Ahtna culture-bearers, for the purpose of educating people about important areas of the culture so that they can be preserved. Providing a broad-ranging overview of Ahtna culture and history, the contents of this work are largely similar to those of the present ethnographic overview and assessment, with some significant differences.

Simeone, William E., and James Kari. 2002. *Traditional Knowledge and Fishing Practices of the Ahtna of the Copper River, Alaska.* **Technical Paper 270. Juneau: Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Subsistence.**

This is a thorough ethnography of traditional beliefs, knowledge, and practices surrounding salmon among the Ahtna. Simeone and Kari outline the highly detailed way in which the Ahtna language describes and categorizes salmon. The authors provide in-depth descriptions of fishing and processing practices, including how labor was organized, and detail the large-scale changes these activities underwent during the twentieth century. They estimate the amount of salmon the Ahtna harvested during the nineteenth century. A narrative told by Katie John, "Putting up Salmon at Batzulnetas," provides a detailed ethnographic description of specific salmon-fishing practices on the upper Copper River. An appendix to the report includes a description of how to make *ba*', or dried fish.

Simeone, William E., and James Kari. 2005. *The Harvest and Use of Non-salmon Fish Species in the Copper River Basin.* **Technical Paper 292. Juneau: Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Subsistence.**

This report details beliefs, knowledge and practices surrounding the harvest and use of non-salmon fish among the Ahtna. Before the mid-twentieth century, non-salmon fish were a far more prominent food source for the Ahtna than they are today. For some Ahtna, especially those living on lakes, their importance was equal to or greater than that of salmon. Several species are available in the area; Simeone and Kari state that "traditionally the most commonly harvested non-salmon species were humpback whitefish and Arctic grayling, followed by round whitefish, steelhead, Dolly Varden, lake trout, longnose sucker, burbot, and rainbow trout" (p. 7). The report describes traditional harvest practices and socio-political changes that have affected non-salmon fisheries during the twentieth century, including the depopulation of many parts of Ahtna country and state regulatory actions favoring sport fisheries over subsistence fisheries. Simeone and Kari present a detailed ethnographic overview of how the Ahtna harvested and processed non-salmon fish, and outline their place in Ahtna belief systems through stories and ritual practices.

Simeone, William. E., Erica McCall Valentine, and Siri Tuttle. 2007. *Ahtna Knowledge of Long-term Changes in Salmon Runs in the Upper Copper River Drainage, Alaska.* **Technical Paper 324. Juneau: Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Subsistence.**

Simeone, Valentine, and Tuttle synthesize Ahtna traditional knowledge with climatological and biological data to describe the fluctuations and long-term changes in salmon runs, especially since the early twentieth century. Fluctuations in the size of salmon runs are driven by a variety of factors, but correlate strongly with ocean temperatures. The authors describe changes in Ahtna fishing patterns that occurred as a result of historical developments and factors that drove permanent declines in harvest levels during the early twentieth century, including overexploitation by canneries at the mouth of the river. They trace the history of how fisheries management and policy developed in response to changes in the runs and fisheries. The authors also discuss environmental factors impacting the fishery in recent years.

Smelcer, John E. 1997*. In the Shadows of Mountains: Ahtna Stories from the Copper River***. Glennallen, AK: Ahtna Heritage Foundation.**

Smelcer states that he collected and edited the stories in this volume to help preserve the Ahtna language, myths, and tales, and to revive interest in Ahtna traditions. Several stories are Ahtna accounts of myths that also are part of the traditions of other Alaska Native groups (e.g., "The Blind Man and the Loon" is a common Alaska Native myth).

Stratton, Lee, and Susan Georgette. 1984. *Use of Fish and Game by Communities in the Copper River Basin, Alaska: A Report on a 1983 Household Survey*. **Technical Paper no. 107. Anchorage**: **Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Subsistence.**

This report presents socioeconomic and historical information for communities in the Copper River Basin and describes resource harvest and use patterns in these communities for the period June 1982 to May 1983.

Strong, B. Stephen. 1972. *An Economic History of the Athabascan Indians of the Upper Copper River, Alaska, with Special Reference to the Village of Mentasta Lake*. **MA thesis, Department of Anthropology, McGill University, Montreal**.

Strong tested three hypotheses in fieldwork conducted in Mentasta during the summer of 1971 and presented the findings in this thesis, which also served as the foundation for his doctoral dissertation (Strong 1976): (1) Economic and social change among the Ahtna in this area resulted from the influences of the larger white society; (2) the specific causal nexus of change was the introduction of commodity production; and (3) specific forms of commodity production and commodity relations give rise to specific economic stages. Much pertinent historical and ethnographic background information is presented for Ahtna in the Mentasta-Batzulnetas-Slana-Suslota area.

Strong, B. Stephen. 1976. *Historical Sequence of the Patterns of Production of the Ahtna Athabascan Indians of the Upper Copper Valley, Alaska: The Development of Capitalism in Alaska*. **PhD dissertation, Department of Anthropology, McGill University, Montreal**.

In his doctoral dissertation, Strong expands on his M.A. thesis and traces the economic history of Ahtna in the upper Copper River valley from the 1700s to 1974. Both pre-contact and contemporary subsistence patterns are described. Reference is made to Ahtna affiliations and interactions with their Upper Tanana neighbors, including situations in which the Ahtna harvested resources in the upper Tanana region and the Upper Tanana procured some resources in Ahtna territory.

University of Alaska Fairbanks. Oral History Program, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library. Wrangell-St. Elias Project Jukebox. Available online at http://jukeobx.uaf.edu/site7/project/644.

Project Jukebox is a web-based oral history collection run by the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) Oral History Program (http://jukebox.uaf.edu) that features interviews on a variety of topics related to Alaska history and culture. Within Project Jukebox, the most extensive source of information on the Ahtna is in the collection on Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve – a project that the NPS funded to document local residents' experiences related to the park. Interviews were conducted during the 1990s and early 2000s, with additional interviews added in the 2010s. Interviews were conducted in Anchorage, Chisana, Chistochina, Chitina, Copper Center, Dot Lake, Fairbanks, Gakona, Glennallen, Gulkana, Kennecott, Kenny Lake, Nabesna, Northway, Slana, Tanacross, Tazlina, Tetlin, Tok, Valdez, and Yakutat, and with NPS employees.

Vanderlugt, Russell. 2022. *Among the Dene: Allen's 1885 Trans-Alaska Expedition*. **Unpublished PhD dissertation. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Fairbanks.**

In 1885, Lieutenant Henry Allen crossed Alaska, surveying 2,500 miles of Dene territory along the Copper, Tanana, and Koyukuk rivers. Allen, with Dene support, documented the social

and physical environment of Alaska's interior. Vanderlugt argues that mutual respect between Allen and Alaska's Dene played an integral role in the expedition's success. (As of this writing, Vanderlugt's dissertation is under embargo until 2024; thus the authors have not been able to fully review it.)

Van Lanen, James M. 2017. Foraging and Motorised Mobility in Contemporary Alaska: A Twenty-First Century "Hunter-Gatherer Situation." *Hunter-Gatherer Research* **3(2): 253–88.**

Van Lanen explores the topics of mobility and access to subsistence foods throughout Alaska, pointing out that virtually all contemporary subsistence hunting, fishing and gathering is done via mechanized transportation. Few contemporary Alaskans have ever had the experience of relying on foot travel or dog sled for these activities. Van Lanen provides examples of hunter/fisher access situations that he encountered during his fieldwork, including both rural (off-the-road system) and urban patterns, evaluating comparative costs given different kinds of equipment. He discusses how mechanization of harvest activities increases social stratification and points out that high-income rural Alaskans are the largest harvesters of subsistence food.

Van Lanen discusses the community subsistence hunt in the Copper River basin, which began in 2009 after being established by the Alaska Board of Game. Initially, the hunt was restricted to local hunters and created local opportunities. After legal challenges, the Alaska Supreme Court ruled that because of the equal-access provision in the Alaska Constitution, it had to be open to all Alaska residents. After this, it quickly became dominated by urban hunters, like other hunts in the region. In Van Lanen's view, rural communities should cultivate community innovation and adaptability as a way of resolving these challenges. Specifically, he suggests that rural Alaskans adapt by redeveloping non-motorized hunting and fishing practices.

VanStone, James W. 1955. Exploring the Copper River Country. *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 46(4):115–23**.**

This article describes the archaeological excavation of Taral, an Ahtna village site on the west side of the Copper River just below the Chitina River. A major village in the nineteenth century, Taral is one of the most famous villages on the Copper River and one of the most significant archaeological sites in the area. Taral site included two or three large winter houses.

West, Constance. 1973. *An Inventory of Trails and Habitation Sites in the Ahtna Region***. Unpublished report, sponsored by the Humanities Forum of Anchorage, Alaska**. **https://uafanlc.alaska.edu/Online/AT973W1973/AT973W1973.pdf. Accessed 3 December 2023.**

In 1973, the Humanities Forum of Anchorage sponsored a project to assemble information on sites of historic and prehistoric occupation in the Ahtna region. Data were derived primarily from the unpublished fieldnotes of Frederica de Laguna, from tapes and transcripts of interviews with Ahtna elders, and from interviews with elders such as Walya Hobson conducted specifically for this project. The 138 documented sites and trails are identified on USGS maps (1:250K scale), which can be also be accessed at the link listed in the bibliographic entry, above. Site descriptions are mostly relatively brief and do not contain extensive ethnographic information.

Wheeler, Polly, and Matt Ganley. 1991. *Socioeconomic Integration of Alaskan Athabaskans***. Unpublished report prepared for the Tanana Chiefs Conference, Fairbanks, AK**.

Legal issues surrounding changes in the configuration of Alaska legislative districts proposed by the governor as part of the reapportionment process prompted preparation of a report that addresses the relative socioeconomic integration of Inupiat, Yup'ik, and Northern Dene areas. As an addendum to the larger report, this paper focuses on interior Alaska Dene and looks specifically at the socioeconomic, political, and cultural integration of the Ahtna and Upper Tanana Dene. Historical, genealogical, and kinship data are used to support the position that these two groups have high degrees of sociopolitical and socioeconomic integration.

Workman, William B. 1977. Ahtna Archaeology: A Preliminary Statement. In *Problems in the Prehistory of the North American Subarctic: The Athapaskan Question***, edited by J. W. Helmer, S. Van Dyke, and F. J. Kense, 22–39. Calgary: University of Calgary Archaeological Association**.

This synopsis of archaeological investigations and findings in Ahtna territory as of the mid-1970s confirms the long-term presence of human habitation there and contains useful, albeit dated, background information. Workman refers to the close ties of the Ahtna with neighboring Upper Tanana and Dena'ina Dene.

Wrangel[l], Ferdinand P. 1980 [1839]. *Russian America: Statistical and Ethnographic Information*. **Kingston, ON: Limestone Press.**

This contains early, albeit rather brief, written ethnographic overviews of several Alaska Native groups, including the Eyak, Ahtna, and Upper Tanana. Wrangell says that the Ahtna are a "a peaceful tribe and live on good terms with all the tribes around, trading with the Chugach, Ugalentsy [Eyak], Kolash [Tlingit], Kolchany [Upper Tanana] and Kenai" (p. 50). He writes that the Copper River area has been famous among other groups because of its copper deposits, and says that "the principal occupation of the Atnas lies in the wild reindeer [caribou] hunt" (p. 50). Wrangell briefly describes caribou hunting techniques and mentions other food sources. He provides a brief overview of their language, cosmological beliefs, and some cultural practices.

" 'Cause you feel for the land and the animals, you have a strong feeling inside you, it's so hard to describe. Like these lands, you know...we never go out there all the time but, we see 'em in our mind. ...You know your ancestors, you know, roam these countries, your people lived off the land and to you it's what they handed down to you, you know, they've brought down...these thing to us and it's been handed down from them to our parents and to us and myself ..."

–Eva John (1988)

The Ahtna are a Northern Dene people who have inhabited the Copper River basin, and surrounding parts of Southcentral Alaska, for thousands of years. Because Ahtna Traditional Territory encompasses a majority of today's Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, the history and culture of the park cannot be understood without knowledge of Ahtna history and culture.

Fanny Sthienfield listening to tape recorder, Chitina, July 12, 1954. Alaska State Library, Frederica de Laguna Photo Collection, P350-54-8-2.