



People of the Chugach Region

Written by John F.C. Johnson, CAC Vice President of Cultural Resources

Archaeological diggings show that the Chugach people have occupied the area for thousands of years, from the time when the Prince William Sound was still largely covered by glaciers during the last ice age. They were also the first Alaskans to meet the European explorer, Vitus Bering, who came to Alaska at Kayak Island in 1741 under the Russian flag. Since the founding of Fort Saint Constantine at Nuchek Village in 1793, the Russian culture has played an important role in Chugach history. Famous Spanish, English and American explorers have also left their mark on the history of the region. During the Early American period, the Region's mineral and fisheries wealth attracted immigrants from all corners of the globe.

CAC is proud of its cultural resources department which is actively working to identify and preserve the archeological resources of the Chugach region by conducting site visits and carefully documenting the finds. Today, shareholders vary from individuals living a traditional subsistence lifestyle to highly-skilled crafts persons, college graduates and business professionals. The integration of modern education and cultural roots has resulted in shareholders who are dedicated to the heritage represented by CAC and are able to contribute significantly to the development of the company.



Chugach descendant, Autumn LeBlanc in Traditional Alutiiq regalia

Origin of the Name

Oral tradition records how the Native name "Chugach" came to be. This story was passed down to me by the late John Klashinoff, who was born in the village of Nuchek, in Prince William Sound in 1906.

John Klashinoff learned many stories from my grandmother's uncle, Chief Makari (Makarka) Chimovitski, who adopted and raised him and 10 other orphans at a new settlement called Makarka Point. In the early 1900's an epidemic that swept across Alaska claimed John's parents and many others.

As he smoked his pipe and scratched his chin, John was proud to tell me old stories so that the traditions and beliefs of the Chugach would not die, but would live on as it was meant to be. The story is told as follows.

For ages and ages Prince William Sound as it was named by Captain James Cook was covered by a solid sheet of glacier ice that extended over nearly all of the bays and mountains. One day Native hunters were kayaking along the outer shores of the Pacific Ocean, when a man cried out:

"Chu-ga, Chu-ga" (hurry, hurry).

"Let's go see what that black thing is sticking out of the ice."

So the hunters paddled closer and closer to see what it was. Within a short distance, the hunters could see mountaintops emerging out of the retreating ice. Thus these ocean travelers settled along the ice-free shores of the Sound.

As the seasons changed from year to year, the ice melted rapidly, exposing deep fjords and lagoons that were rich in sea life and provided good beaches to settle on. It was known that life thrived in the areas where the salt and fresh water met.



Elders Alex Moonin (deceased) & Henry Makarka



Valdez Hunters around 1900

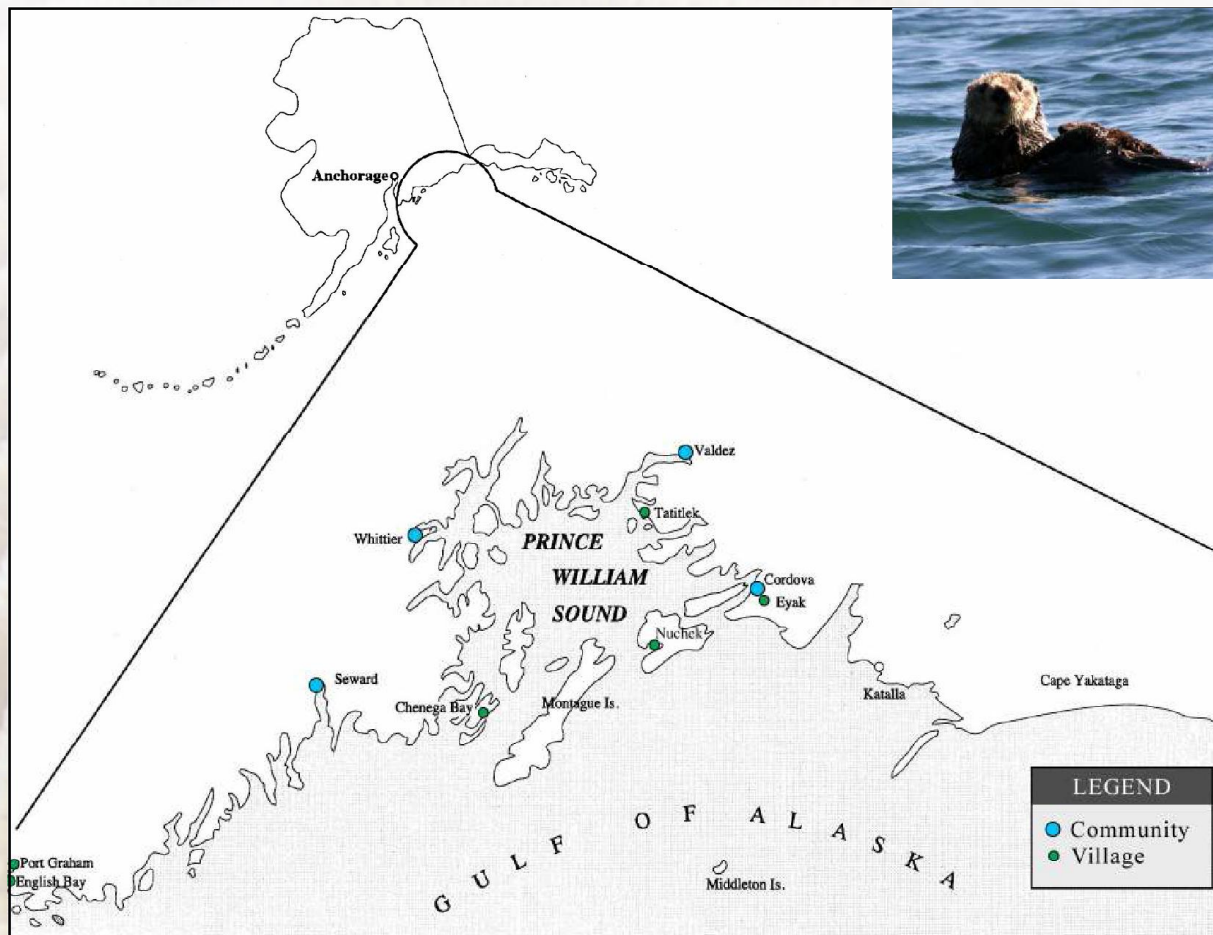
When the ice retreated, so did the animals. The Chugach people followed the ice and animals deep into the heart of Prince William Sound, where they remain to this very day.

The Lands We Live In

The Chugach Alaska Corporation Region includes the four communities of Cordova, Seward, Valdez, and Whittier, and the five Native villages of Port Graham, Chenega Bay, Eyak, Nanwalek (English Bay) and Tatitlek. Approximately 550,000 acres of the lands are subsurface estate from the region's Native village surface entitlements. It includes more than 5,000 miles of coastline, at the heart of which lies Prince William Sound. The city of Valdez has the largest population with 4,469 residents and Chenega Bay has the smallest with 69 local residents.

The lands and waters are rich in timber, minerals and wildlife resources. Spectacular scenery and recreational activities are the focus of increasingly lucrative tourism opportunities for the Corporation. The sound's majestic fiords, bays and waterways are home to a diverse population of fish, marine mammals and birds. The land's diversity ranges from glacier and mountains to dense forests of hemlock and spruce that thrive here.

We are proud of our lands and our cultural resources department is actively working to identify and preserve the archeological resources of the Chugach people by conducting visits and careful documentation of sacred and historical sites. Utilization of the land for economic purposes is closely balanced with the subsistence and archeological uses of resources.



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