

## Bears, Fish, Archeology, and Deferred Maintenance at Brooks Camp, Katmai National Park and Preserve

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Katmai National Park and Preserve includes 4,600,000 acres on the Alaska Peninsula that encompasses the Pacific Coast; the Aleutian Range, currently glaciated and punctuated by active volcanoes; and lakes filling glacial troughs that extend from the mountains to the terminal moraines in the Bristol Bay tundra lowland.

In the 1950s, Ray Petersen established five lodges in what is now Katmai National Park and Preserve. Four of the lodges are near short rivers connecting large lakes because Peterson recognized that the large sockeye salmon runs on these streams produced world-class rainbow trout fishing. Brooks Camp, now the most visited area of Katmai National Park and Preserve, occupies the downstream end of the mile-long Brooks River which flows from Brooks Lake to Naknek Lake (Figure 1). The salmon runs on Brooks River also attracted many other species, including brown bears and people (Figure 2).

In 1950, archeologists noted the presence of three archeological sites in the Brooks Camp vicinity. The fish camp by the river mouth started as a group of World War II surplus tents, but soon new facilities were built on XMK-044, an important archeological site on the terrace next to the fish camp. The National Park Service (NPS) began to establish a presence, building a cabin and a boat house a little way down the shore of Naknek Lake.

Researchers from the University of Oregon, directed by Don Dumond, conducted archeological research at Brooks Camp from 1960 to 1970, identifying 20 sites that showed that people had lived along Brooks River for at least 4,500 years (Dumond 1981). The Brooks River archeological record begins with camps of early nomadic hunters related to the Northern Archaic tradition, around 4500 BP, and continues to end of the Brooks River Bluffs phase of the Koniag tradition, around AD 1820. This research demonstrated that people occupied and re-occupied Brooks River despite frequent disruptive or catastrophic volcanic eruptions. Today, hundreds of large and small surface depressions arranged along terraces and beach ridges mark Brooks River archeological sites. Archeologists estimate that only one-third of the houses are visible as surface features.

NPS interpreters sometimes ask why the archeological sites at Brooks Camp are worth preserving after having undergone such exten-

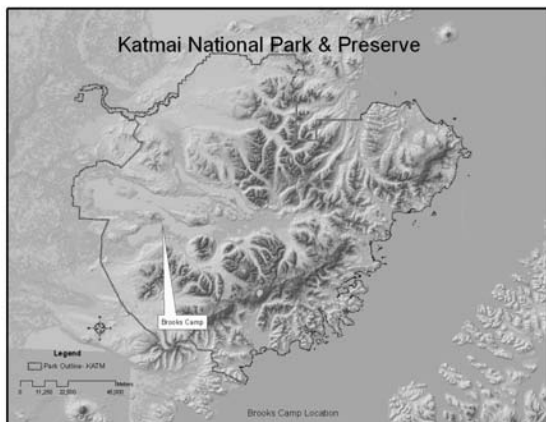


Figure 1. Geographic setting of Brooks Camp in Katmai National Park and Preserve.



Figure 2. Sport fishermen and brown bear sharing Brooks River in autumn.

sive research. Dumond constructed a 4,500-year cultural chronology that demonstrates that the Brooks Camp archeological record has links with archeological traditions from both the Bering Sea and the North Pacific regions. We know less about the lives of the people who occupied the many houses, and how the groups of houses and pit features along the river and lake terraces functioned as communities. Why, after centuries of occupation, were year-round settlements abandoned at Brooks River, and why have archeologists not found evidence of use there during the Russian period? These are important questions for understanding the history of the region. The Brooks River sites were listed as an archeological district on the National Register of Historic Places, and later the district was designated a national historic landmark (NHL) in recognition of its national significance. Protecting the Brooks River NHL from the constant pressure to develop and upgrade facilities for guests and park staff is a continual challenge for NPS archeologists.

### **Archeological compliance**

As the lodge developed and added guest cabins, numerous impacts to archeological site occurred, including construction of two cellars and installation of water, electric, and sewer utilities between the lodge and guest cabins. In 1969, archeologists were called to Brooks Lodge to evaluate a large pit filled with ash, charcoal, and burned bone found in a sewer trench being dug for a new guest cabin. At least four graves were disturbed by construction in the vicinity of Brooks Lodge before 1974. In 1974, lodge construction uncovered six graves that were observed by an archeologist, but not investigated. At least 13 graves have been encountered in archeological excavations or naturally eroding contexts.

As both the lodge and the NPS operations at Brooks Camp developed during the 1980s, many small archeological investigations occurred due to installing and maintaining electric, water, and sewer systems. These small excavations were by and large limited to the footprint of planned disturbances, but were never expanded to fully investigate archeological features encountered. These incremental impacts continued into the 1990s; however, the results of these small investigations have never been integrated into a study guided by research questions. As a result, we know very little about the large settlement under Brooks Lodge. By 1990, NPS archeologists began to avoid further impacts to archeological resources and promoted a “no new ground disturbance” policy aided by the protection provided by a 9- to 18-inch 1912 tephra layer.

### **Alaska Native interests in Brooks Camp**

Alaska Native people occupied much of Katmai National Monument and Preserve until the 1912 Novarupta Eruption that formed the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes. At that time, people lived in villages at the upper end of Naknek Lake along the lower Savonoski River, which is fed by glaciers on the western slopes of the Aleutian Range. The people fled downstream and founded New Savonoski on the lower Naknek River across from the Yupik village of Paugvik. Probably by the 1930s people began to return to the mouth of Brooks River in the fall to net red salmon. When Petersen established his fish camp in 1950, there were at least three cabins in the area of the river mouth, permanent log fish-drying racks, and wall tent sites.

In the early 1990s two things happened. First, the family of Pelegia Melgenak, who had lived at Old Savonoski, claimed 160 acres at the mouth of Brooks River as a native allotment. After a long court case the heirs prevailed and gained title to land on the south side of the river. This family organized as the Heirs of Pelegia Melgenak and sold some of the land back to the NPS 1998. They retained a 10-acre parcel of land and established a conservation easement on the south bank of the river mouth in cooperation with the NPS.

Second, in 1989 shoreline investigations related to the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill focused attention on the Katmai Coast where archeologists found human remains eroding from archeological sites. In 1990, the NPS became aware that fuel leaks from numerous fuel tanks, fuel lines, and underground fuel storage tanks threatened to contaminate Brooks River, Naknek Lake, and Brooks Lake. Efforts to clean up the fuel were complicated by the presence of archeological deposits, including human graves. Due to concerns about the treatment of the remains of their ancestors, a group of Alaska Native people from South Naknek formed the Council of Katmai Descendants (CKD), which represents all Alaska Natives with cultural ties to Katmai National Monument and Preserve. The CKD is recognized by the NPS and is endorsed by the Bristol Bay Native Association as the official Alaska Native representatives in cultural matters in Katmai and Brooks Camp. In matters concerning protocols and treatment of the remains of Alaska Natives in Katmai National Park and Preserve, the park consults primarily with the CKD.

### **Brooks River development concept plan**

Beginning in 1989, the NPS began planning to determine how to protect Brooks Camp

resources, including brown bear habitat and nationally significant archeological sites. This became the Brooks Area development concept plan. The steadily increasing numbers of bear viewers at Brooks Camp was far beyond the capacity of existing lodging and bear viewing facilities. To provide infrastructure to meet visitor needs meant additional impacts on archeological resources. Increasing numbers of brown bears fishing on Brooks River emphasized its importance as bear habitat and increased the need for the NPS to manage visitors to avoid injury and the habituation of bears. Recognizing that limiting visitors was not an option, the NPS reached a decision in 1996 to create a “people-free zone” on the north side of Brooks River and relocate all NPS and lodge facilities south of the river to the Beaver Pond terrace.

An archeological survey in 1999 tested and cleared a 40-acre parcel on the Beaver Pond Terrace with access roads to visitor arrival areas on Brooks Lake and Naknek Lake. But funding was lost and the plan was put on hold. The NPS did implement part of the development concept plan in 1999 by constructing an elevated boardwalk to replace the last part of the trail to the Brooks Falls bear viewing platform. The trail was eroding a major archeological site where bears liked to sleep in house depressions covered in high grass next to the trail.

### **Deteriorating infrastructure in the 21st century**

Since 2000 NPS archeologists continue to avoid major impacts to archeological resources with the “no new ground disturbance” policy. However, the need to replace or install new infrastructure in terms of housing, electrical utilities, maintenance facilities, visitor facilities, and wastewater disposal has become critical. Upgrades in housing and the electrical systems were planned and funded. The park struggles with the issue of providing access across the Brooks River Bridge without displacing bears from prime habitat.

In November 2005, NPS engineers proposed to construct a reserve leach field at Brooks Camp in response to signs of failure of the existing leach field. They originally proposed to build the 25x40-meter facility contiguous with the south edge of the existing leach field, which would have put it within archeological site XMK-043, where previous research showed that houses and occupation surfaces as well as graves existed (Figure 3). Project managers rejected implementing an archeological data recovery program to clear the area due to the costs and need to replace the leach field without delay.

NPS archeologists proposed constructing the new leach field well north of Brooks River, reasoning that distance from the river would decrease the chance of encountering archeological sites (Figure 4). Consultation with the CKD and the Heirs of Pelegia Melgenak showed that they supported constructing the leach field away from areas of known archeological sites. People specifically mentioned that they did not support building a leach field over the graves of their ancestors.

Archeological testing at the northern alternative surprisingly located a hearth and lithic scatter dated  $2,479 \pm 50$  BP (BETA 220451), or 520 BC. This date places the occupation of the new site between the Smelt Creek Phase of the Norton tradition and earlier Gravels phase of the Arctic Small Tool tradition. Torrential rains disclosed that the water table at the northern location was too high for a leach field to function correctly.

Katmai National Monument and Preserve managers directed archeologists to investigate a linear landscape feature just southeast of the existing leach field that seemed to be the best

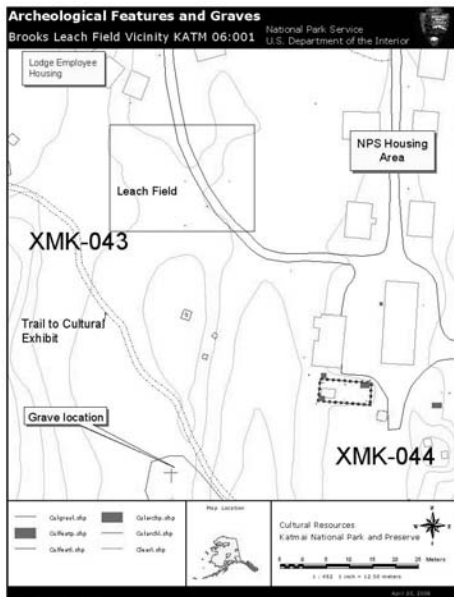
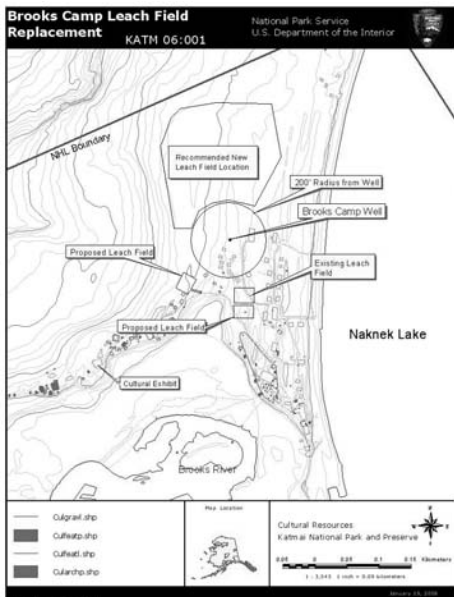


Figure 3. Location of Brooks Camp leach field and adjacent archeological features and graves.

Figure 4. Brooks Camp showing archeological features, the current leach field, and proposed leach field locations.

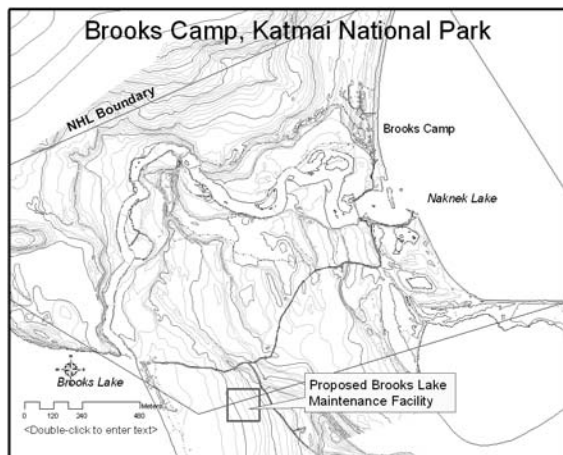
chance for installing a leach field without impacting archeological resources. Systematic investigation of this area disclosed the presence of at least two occupation surfaces that were probably within houses. This alternative was dropped when archeologists discovered a grave within the area proposed for the leach field.

With the discovery of the grave, Katmai National Park and Preserve realized that protecting archeological resources required a different approach. A plan was made to rebuild the leach field in the existing excavation at its current location. In order to prolong the life of the reconstructed leach field, the park is taking action to reduce the number of people using facilities on the north side of Brooks River.

Planned new replacement housing for deteriorating wall tents was shifted from Brooks Camp to a five-acre site for a new maintenance yard on the south side of the river (Figure 5), thus reducing the number of NPS staff using Brooks Camp utilities by eight.

There are currently three laws for protecting archeological sites on

Figure 5. Brooks Camp area with proposed new maintenance facility south of Brooks River.



federal land. The Archeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA) protects sites from illegal digging—not an issue at Brooks Camp. The National Historic Preservation Act, which requires federal managers to take into account the effect of federal undertakings on archeological resources, involved archeologists in project planning. However, at Brooks Camp adequate funding to mitigate the impacts of projects beyond their actual footprint was never available. Thus, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation act (NAGPRA) has become the ultimate protector of Brooks Camp's archeological resources by giving the power to the lineal descendants and culturally affiliated people to protect the remains of their ancestors.

### **Reference**

Dumond, D.E. 1981. *Archaeology on the Alaska Peninsula: The Naknek Region, 1960–1975*. University of Oregon Anthropological Papers no. 21. Eugene: University of Oregon.