Overview of 2000 NPS Aniakchak Archaeological Survey — Rich VanderHoeck

Summary
All major objectives of the 2000 Aniakchak Archaeological Survey were achieved. Sections of the Meshik and Cinder River valleys were surveyed by foot (or kayak), as were sections along the foothills in the back of Kujulik Bay. Pedestrian survey in 2000 covered approximately 600? acres, which coupled with past surveys totals 3460 acres of monument and preserve. Three new sites were discovered, one of them a village site with 14 features, bringing the total of sites found by the Aniakchak Archaeological Survey to 38. Important geologic sections in the monument and preserve were tested, and a considerable number of chronologically controlled tephra samples were taken. Testing of village sites in the Meshik River valley and in Kujulik Bay contributed data that will help us understand the early occupation, use, and abandonment of the region. Management activities included overflights of the bear guide operations at Rainbow Creek and on the Cinder River, and the Cinder River operation was visited on the ground, with photos taken of each.

Helicopter Survey
The 2000 Aniakchak archaeological survey was a productive one, with helicopter time lost to weather at the start being the only real drawback. The two days of sole helicopter use at the start of the project was reduced to three-quarters of a day by poor weather. In spite of this overflights were done of the Meshik, Aniakchak, and Cinder River valleys, high country adjacent to the valleys, and the back berms in Amber Bay.

The rear section of Amber Bay was surveyed in an effort to determine whether there were any rear beach berms that reflect mid to early Holocene deposition. No beach berms inland of the berm containing SUT-033 were found. A stop was made at SUT-033, the site with both historic and prehistoric components that are being eroded by Main Creek. A measurement from the erosion datum placed in 1999 showed that 1.1m of site, including the prehistoric hearths dated in 1999, have eroded in the last year into Main Creek.

On the first day a planning flight was made through the Meshik and Cinder River valleys and locations were picked for future camps and surveys. The landform where CHK-035, a ~25 feature site found by Dumond in the 1980’s, was located, and aerial photos were taken. The bear guide camp on Rainbow Creek was also located and aerial photos taken. Over-flights of Aniakchak River and Albert Johnson Creek found no evidence of the trapping cabins reported by Morseth.

A permit to land and do subsurface testing on the Alaska Peninsula National Wildlife Refuge was obtained before the start of the field season. No potential sites were noted outside of the monument and preserve so no landings were made on refuge land.

Meshik River
The archaeological crew members (VanderHoek and Navarra) were dropped at an island-like landform east of Plenty Bear Creek in the Meshik Valley for testing, while the geologic crew (Dilley and Brandt) performed an aerial survey and geologic test of the large rear berm in the main berm complex in Aniakchak Bay. The crew was united at the island landform in the Meshik Valley, and used it as a base of operations for survey of that part of the preserve. Survey of this landform and the adjacent river valley found two archaeological sites. One of these sites (CHK-059) contains 14 depressional features, 7 of them large enough to be house pits. This site is located on the eastern side of the island landform, running up the crest of a steep-sided ridge. A test in one feature produced flakes, charcoal, three bi-notched stones and a fragment of ground
slate. This site is located 10 km east up the Meshik Valley from CHK-035, and 29 km west down the valley from a 19 feature village site (SUT-022) found by NPS personnel in 1997 at the outlet of Meshik Lake. It will be interesting to see what CHK-059 dates to, for a date of ~1300 B.P. would make it contemporaneous with the other three village sites, all occupied in a narrow 100 year range, in the Meshik/Aniakchak River corridor.

The other site found in the area (CHK-058) contains three depressional features, though three tests only produced the fragments of an expedient lamp, with no charcoal observed. A massive exposure of the 3400 B.P. pyroclastic flow was sampled and profiled in Plenty Bear Valley.

Lava Creek
The crew of four camped one night at Lava Creek near the large waterfall in the central drainage. Both sides of the river were surveyed going downstream from the falls, looking for the watercraft (kayak or dory) reported by Tom Miller of USGS/AVO. No cultural material was found. The waterfall was found to be formed by a resistant welded flow deposit, not by a lava flow as reported by one of the Alaska Volcano Observatory (AVO) ANIA 2000 crew. The flow has since (8/10/00) been reported by Scott Dreher (UA) to be one of the pyroclastic flows from the caldera-forming eruption. The material on the underside of the pyroclastic flow is not as durable as that on the top, and in spalling off is creating a rockshelter along the northern side of the falls. This rockshelter is 15-20m long and up to 5m deep. It is paved with platy spalls from the roof of the shelter, with the outer floor edge covered by a 5m berm of the same material. No cultural material was observed. Any cultural material that may have been present prehistorically would have been buried by considerable roof-fall. The amount of roof-fall material present, and the fact that only platy welded tuff was found in the shelter with very little fines or soil, suggested a very dynamic environment with rockfall from the ceiling a constant danger.

Cinder River
Good weather favored the AVO and NPS helicopter-aided work between July 10th and 12, but caused AVO to finish and leave a day early, shorting the NPS crew several hours of potential helicopter time. The last NPS helicopter flights dropped the geologic crew at a 30m+ hill to test along Cinder River, while the archaeological crew was landed with gear and folding kayak at the confluence of Cinder River and Wiggly Creek. The Cinder River float survey walked the 2 and 4m terraces at the confluence of the Cinder and Wiggly Creek, and then floated the Cinder River, with pedestrian surveys of the areas around the stream confluences intersecting the Cinder River. The Cinder River was found to be surprisingly shallow, with cut bank deposits suggesting rapid increases and decreases in river flow. No cultural deposits were found on the float survey, though the large amount of stream cutting suggests that many sites could have already been destroyed. No sites were found on the tall landform. Movement of camp gear across the river was delayed a day because of high winds along the river (up to 70mph), suggesting that the upper Cinder River corridor may have been a less than optimal subsistence environment. Gear was ferried across the river, up a hill and through brush to the cinder plain at Cinder River Lodge for pickup by Cessna 185. While at the cinder plain the Cinder River Lodge was visited and photos were taken.

Kujulik Bay
On July 27th the survey crew flew by Cessna 185 to the Pacific Coast of the monument and preserve, landing on a firm sand beach in Kujulik Bay approximately 4 kilometers to the west
of the mouth of North Fork Creek. The survey crew was joined by three volunteers: Karen Workman, of Anchorage, and Lisa Hofman and Sam McTiernan of Port Heiden. This beach, directly to the west of SUT-039, the Wedge Village site, is one of the firmest yet visited by NPS on the preserve’s coast. A long sandy beach stretches for kilometers in each direction, with an inset on the wedge’s eastern side acting to catch driftwood floating in the long-shore current. Two clear-water streams to the east of the site supply plentiful fresh water.

Camp was made on an unvegetated cinder plain near the Wedge Village site. Subsequent investigation of this cinder plain revealed 5 loci of flake scatters, resulting in the assigning of the 38th site number (SUT-045) of this project. The three volunteers, headed by Karen Workman, began a test trench of the very large (24 by 26m) depression at SUT-039, in an attempt to better understand the construction and occupational history of the feature. The crew performed pedestrian survey along the bedrock edge of the back bay system, tested features at SUT-038 and SUT-039, and mapped SUT-045. Crewmembers also used soil probes to map distributions of charcoal, shell and rock at SUT-038 and SUT-039. Dilley and Brandt performed a measured transect of the Kujulik Bay berms, and collected driftwood samples from a deep blowout in the same system.

Overflight

A Cessna 185 from C-Air was contracted to perform an overflight sections of the monument and preserve because the reduced helicopter coverage did not allow as much aerial survey as originally planned. The flight covered the main passes and adjacent high country, looking for signs of human utilization, especially possible caribou fences and hunting blinds. No sign of previously unknown cultural activity was discovered.