

REPORT OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD SURVEY
IN THE WILLOW-WASILLA AREA, 1978

HARZA-EBASCO
Susitna Joint Venture
Document Number

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METHODOLOGY

The area covered in the survey work during 1978 was, roughly, along the Little Susitna River, around most of the lakes south of Willow Creek, east of the Parks Highway, west of the Susitna River, and north of Knik Arm. Additionally the lower part of Kroto Creek (Deshka River) was partially examined. With the exception of the village area at the outlet of Red Shirt Lake, the level of investigation was a reconnaissance using knowledge of high probability areas as the guide to localities selected for more intensive examination. As the purpose of the survey was to provide as much data as possible for a broad scale land-use study and not for a specific resource impacting action, the level of intensity was judged adequate. Biases such as relying on incomplete knowledge of aboriginal use patterns were unavoidable, so this report can in no way be construed as more than a very incomplete sampling of the area's cultural resources. Additionally, examination from a helicopter for vegetation or other surface indicators of past use further biases the results toward the historic period.

The specific approach used in locating sites was to define on a 1:63,360 scale map those areas which showed some promise in yielding cultural remains and then making an aerial examination by helicopter. Two days were spent flying in the area to refine those areas marked for more intensive examination. Specific localities were then examined on the ground, and small test probes made to locate possible subsurface materials. The purpose of the testing was to confirm existence of a site rather than to obtain a collection for analysis or to find site limits.

The criteria for defining probable site localities were: confluences of side streams with a larger stream or lake, prominences along lakes and streams, prominences holding potential as hunting lookouts, prominences with exposures of soil which could be quickly examined, and disturbed areas in the apparent normal vegetation pattern. Additionally, some time was spent trying to confirm and catalog the remains at a number of reported sites in the area. Two days were spent making limited tests at the Fish Creek Site on Knik Arm. A total of 15 working days were spent in the field.

Tanaina residents of the Nancy Lake area, Shem Pete and his son, Billy Pete, gave information about use of the area, routes of travel, and some site locations. Shem Pete had spent a part of his youth in a village at the outlet of Red Shirt Lake and is very knowledgeable about the area. Billy Pete has spent quite a lot of time hunting and trapping in the general area and has knowledge of resource use by the local Tanaina. A flight over the Nancy Lake

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Recreation Area and the lower reaches of the Susitna River and Kroto Creek was made with Shem and Billy Pete and Dr. James and Priscilla Kari of the Alaska Native Language Center. Dr. Kari has been working with Shem Pete and others to record Tanaina place names. During the flight, the party landed at Red Shirt Lake outlet and walked down to the locality of the cabin in which Shem Pete had lived. He was able to show us where a graveyard had existed for those buried in the Russian Orthodox faith.

Through use of Shem and Billy Pete as informants, several sites were located which would not normally have been found in the time allowed. In addition, several others have been reported which have not been verified on the ground and therefore cannot be precisely marked.

ETHNOGRAPHIC LAND USE PATTERNS

The ethnographic information available on the inhabitants of the study area is contained almost totally in the monograph by Cornelius Osgood, The Ethnography of the Tanaina. The Tanaina Indians occupied the entire Cook Inlet area at the time Osgood conducted his fieldwork in the summers of 1931 and 1932. While most of this information was collected from informants in the Kenai and Kachemak Bay areas, he was able to elicit some information from informants at Eklutna and Susitna. Unfortunately the study area, a portion of Osgood's Upper Inlet and Susitna subdivisions, was one of the most poorly covered areas of his Tanaina ethnography. The following resumé of parts of the Tanaina culture in the study area has been extracted almost entirely from Osgood and will not be further cited unless indicated otherwise.

The Tanaina Athapaskans are the only group of northern Athapaskans who inhabit a coastal maritime area. Their past cultural practices and materials reflected, as a whole group, utilization of maritime resources and adoption of subsistence-related traits from their Eskimo neighbors. Tanaina culture reflects increasing adaptation to a maritime life style as one proceeds from the northern part of Tanaina territory toward the south end in Kachemak Bay. Possibly excepting the Nondalton and Lime Village groups, the Upper Inlet-Susitna groups reflect the most interior environment-oriented Tanaina. Students of Tanaina culture and history generally agree that the people originally came from a more interior homeland and moved into an area previously inhabited by Eskimos. Retention of the interior life style among the Upper Inlet-Susitna people may be due to a number of reasons ranging from lack of need for change to continued influence from their more interior Athapaskan neighbors.

According to patterns of land use noted in Osgood, the Tanaina of the Susitna and Upper Inlet areas concentrated most activities along streams and lakes having runs of anadromous fish. The annual salmon runs would have provided the most stable and easily collected source of food. Use of moose, caribou, and other large land mammals would have been relatively more important to the Indians of this area than among most of the Tanaina but still of secondary importance. One would expect that the more important village sites would occur along drainages with large salmon runs and this appears to be the case.

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The most important villages in later historic times were at Susitna Station, Alexander Creek, Kroto Creek, Eklutna and Knik, with lesser settlements reported at Wasilla, Nancy Lake and Red Shirt Lake (Shem Pete 1978: personal communication).

Summer fishing and winter trapping would have induced establishment of seasonal temporary settlements. These would have been along salmon streams at good fishing spots and at locations convenient to a supply of firewood and shelter from storms, but equally important, accessible to good trapping grounds.

Shem Pete, of the Willow area, was able to relate how the country around Red Shirt Lake specifically was utilized. He reported, in addition to the Red Shirt Village of his youth, the existence of an early historic village at what is called Indian Bay on Nancy Lake.

Red Shirt Village stretched from the outlet of Red Shirt Lake downstream along both banks of Fish Creek for approximately one-half of a mile. Another half mile further down Fish Creek, at its confluence with the stream draining Cow Lake, was another reported village site. Pottery sherds of European origin and bone were found there. Additionally, Shem Pete indicated the past existence of a village location near the outlet of Cow Lake.

The outlet of Red Shirt Lake was bridged by the Tanaina to allow passage to parts of Red Shirt Village on both sides of the creek. Shem Pete also related that basket traps were used to catch lake trout throughout the year. These were placed in the lake shallows near the outlet. Posts from the trap assembly could, according to Shem Pete, be seen in the shallows until recent time when boating recreationists removed them.

Tanaina place name information identified a number of locations which have been examined on the ground and found to possess physical remains of past habitations. The information used here has been collected by Dr. James Kari from the following Tanaina people: Shem Pete, Billy Pete, Katherine Nicolie, Peter Stepen, Mike Alex (deceased), John Stump (deceased) Bailey Theodore, and Mike Theodore. It was provided by Dr. Kari in manuscript form as part of a larger list (1979).

<u>Location</u>	<u>Tanaina Place Name</u>	<u>Alaska Heritage Resources Survey (AHRs) Site No.</u>
Red Shirt Lake Village	Tanmtunt	TYO-003
Old Cottonwood Creek Village	Vadzat	ANC-035
Old village site three-fourths of a mile north of Knik on Knik Arm	Błni Ts'unaghelqeni	--- ---

Alexander Creek Village	Tuquenag'	TYO-013
Susitna Station Village	Tsat'ukeght	TYO-008
Kroto Creek Village	Dasq'e	TYO-001

The large village and cache pit site locality designated TYO-036 may correspond with the steep bank four miles up Kroto Creek called "Tsał Dudideht." This has been translated to mean "coffin fell down."

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Previous archaeological work done in the study area was concentrated along the shores of Knik Arm or along the Parks Highway corridor.

Frederica de Laguna (1975) spent part of the 1930 field season in the area excavating ANC-037 at the mouth of Fish Creek on Knik Arm. Those efforts were inspired by the presence in the Alaska State Museum of a decorated stone oil lamp. The lamp was of a variety notably associated with Kachemak III remains at Yukon Island (SEL-001) and Cottonwood Creek (SEL-030), Kachemak Bay. De Laguna's excavations were not spectacularly fruitful but provided information which spurred later work.

The Fish Creek Site (ANC-037) was examined again in 1966, as were other sites in the vicinity, some of which had been reported by de Laguna. The excavations directed by A. D. Spaulding, and reported by Dumond and Mace (1968), were mainly in a house depression which was trenched. The house yielded a labret, pottery, a copper awl, and miscellaneous other stone artifacts. This material, in conjunction with that collected by de Laguna, prompted Dumond and Mace to conclude that Eskimos had inhabited the area until after A.D. 1000 and had been supplanted by Tanaina Athapaskans sometime after A.D. 1650 but before A.D. 1800 (Dumond and Mace 1968: 19). These and de Laguna's excavations are the only systematic excavations that have been accomplished to date in the study area.

A survey along portions of the Palmer-Wasilla Highway by the Alaska Division of Parks in 1978 yielded negative results (Gibson 1979: personal communication).

A survey of Alaska State Park waysides in 1971 by R. Greg Dixon and W. F. Johnson was the only other organized archaeological survey done until 1978 in the Willow/Wasilla area (Dixon and Johnson 1972). That survey touched on the wayside campgrounds at Nancy Lake, Finger Lake and Willow Creek with largely negative results. The single exception was discovery of one questionable waste flake near the entrance to Nancy Lake Wayside. Subsequent testing at the locality, designated TYO-006, did not yield any more artifacts or other cultural evidence.

SITES AND REPORTED SITES

Sites located in the area investigated have been, for the purposes of this report, divided into three categories which are further subdivided according to U.S.G.S. quadrangle. A conscious attempt has been made to deal with sites which contain information about native populations as a primary importance. That would delete those sites primarily important to Euroamerican history. However, as those sites determined eligible for, or listed on, the National Register of Historic Places require treatment not normally afforded other sites, those properties so designated which are within the study area have been listed. They all derive their significance from non-native associations. The second category of sites is that which makes up the bulk of the sites in the study area, these being listed in the Alaska Heritage Resources Survey. Existence of these sites has been confirmed and the locational information is accurate enough to be entered. The last category of sites focuses on reported sites which do not have sufficient locational data or have not been confirmed to exist by an on-site examination.

NATIONAL REGISTER PROPERTIES

Knik Town Site (ANC-003): This property was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on July 24, 1973. Knik derives its significance from having served as a trading and transportation center for a large area of the interior of Southcentral Alaska. It is the Knik Arm terminus of the historic Iditarod Trail.

Teeland's Country Store (ANC-114): This building is located at the intersection of Knik Road and the Parks Highway and was entered onto the National Register on November 14, 1978. The original portion of the store was first constructed in Knik and moved to its present location in 1917. The property derives its significance from longtime use as a store in both Knik and Wasilla.

Wasilla Depot (ANC-088): The Alaska Railroad Wasilla Depot was built in 1917 with establishment of the Wasilla townsite and was entered onto the National Register on December 16, 1977. The well-preserved structure gained its significance from long-time service as the center of railroad activities in Wasilla and as an office for engineers constructing the Alaska Railroad.

CONFIRMED ALASKA HERITAGE RESOURCES SURVEY SITES

Anchorage Quadrangle:

ANC-035 Cottonwood Creek Vicinity. This site is a large locality approximately one and one-half miles above the mouth of the creek and along both banks. Consists of about 50 cache pits and eight house pits. The area has yielded a relatively large amount of artifacts including stone adze heads and an antler club (Dumond and Mace 1968: 5).

- ANC-036 Knik Lake Locale. This site area is on a hill near the north shore of Knik Lake and also along the south shore. The remains are house pits with attached rooms, and cache pits. A house pit excavated on the north shore of the lake yielded copper, wood, and bone implements and glass beads. Other artifacts from the locale include worked stone and Euroamerican goods (Dumond and Mace 1968: 6).
- ANC-037 Fish Creek Site. The site area at the mouth of Fish Creek is indicated by existence of cache pits on both sides of the creek, thin midden remains, and house pits. Some of the house pits are as much as one-fourth of a mile north of the creek. Excavations by de Laguna (1975: 148) and Dumond and Mace (1968: 9) produced stone implements, pottery fragments, and copper tools. Those remains indicate an occupation of Eskimo-related people who lived there about A.D. 1000-1500. The locality was used historically by the Tanaina as a fishing camp (de Laguna 1975: 148; Dumond and Mace 1968: 9).
- ANC-038 Fischer-Hong Site. This site is located along an unnamed creek draining White Lake one mile southwest of Knik. The remains consist of housepits, cache pits, and two large circular pits. One housepit has been excavated by the University of Oregon (Dumond and Mace 1968: 3).
- ANC-040 Big Lake Vicinity. Firecracked rocks and several pieces of worked stone have been found at the outlet of Big Lake. Other materials have been reported in the vicinity (Behnke 1973: personal communication to the Alaska Division of Parks).
- ANC-119 Lake Creek #1. The site is located on the west side of the outlet of Nancy Lake, Lake Creek. Eight house pits and seven small cache pits are situated on an esker or similar type of feature (Dixon 1976).
- ANC-125 Crocker Creek Site. This locality is located along Crocker Creek near its mouth. It consists of three house pits and numerous cache pits. The site has been reported as the locality of a historic Tanaina village (Rabich 1977: personal communication).
- ANC-245 Lake Creek #2. This site is at the confluence of Lake Creek and the Little Susitna River and consists of several cache pits. The location was probably used as a summer fishing camp (Reger 1978a).
- ANC-246 Blodgett Lake Site. This site, located at the outlet of Blodgett Lake in a private garden, yielded charred skeletal remains and several stone flakes. Subsequent testing by a crew from Alaska Methodist University yielded nothing (West 1970: personal communication).

Tyonek Quadrangle:

- TYO-001 Kroto. This locality has yielded a quantity of firecracked rock eroding out of the bank. Indian habitations were noted in 1898 by Lt. H. G. Learnard (Learnard 1899: 655; Behnke 1973: personal communication to the Alaska Division of Parks).

- TYO-003 Red Shirt Village. This is a historic Tanaina village site reported along both banks of the Fish Creek outlet of Red Shirt Lake. It consists of a number of cache pits, cabin remains and a graveyard area. Use information was given by Shem Pete, a Tanaina elder from the Willow area (Behnke 1973: personal communication to the Alaska Division of Parks; Shem Pete 1978: personal communication; Reger 1978a).
- TYO-006 Nancy Lake Site. This location, at the entrance to the Nancy Lake Wayside, initially yielded a stone flake; however, subsequent testing yielded nothing. The site has probably been destroyed by development activities (Dixon and Johnson 1972: 56).
- TYO-008 Tyo 8. This locality has been identified as the site of a former Russian Orthodox Church building at Susitna Village. The village location was reported to be the site of an aboriginal village (Alaska Heritage Resources Survey 1974a).
- TYO-013 Alexander. This historic village is the site of numerous house pits yielding historic items (de Laguna 1975: 139; Shem Pete 1978: personal communication; Behnke 1973: personal communication to the Alaska Division of Parks).
- TYO-014 Tyo 14. The site is located on a small hill on the south side of Willow Creek approximately one mile above its mouth. There are 10-15 cache pits at the location (Behnke 1973: personal communication to the Alaska Division of Parks; Reger 1978a).
- TYO-018 Susitna Roadhouse. The roadhouse is located at Susitna Village or Station on the east bank of the Susitna River. The village was a historic Tanaina village (Smith 1974).
- TYO-034 Fish Creek #2. This reported aboriginal village site was located at the confluence of the creek draining Cow Lake and Fish Creek, on the west bank of the latter. The site is a small area with one cache pit which yielded one cut bone and historic crockery fragments (Reger 1978a).
- TYO-035 Horseshoe Caches. The site is located on the west side of the creek draining Horseshoe Lake into the Little Susitna River. Five cache pits were located at the outlet on a terrace 3 m above lake level (Reger 1978a).
- TYO-036 Deshka River #1. The site begins approximately three miles above the mouth of the river on the west bank. Five house pits and 150 plus cache pits are located along a half mile bluff. The cache pits are frequently arranged in pairs and multiple pairs. One cache pit complex consisted of 10 individual pits arranged in five pairs in a row (Reger 1978a).

REPORTED SITES WITH UNCONFIRMED EXISTENCE OR LOCATIONS

- ANC-007 Memory Lake. A chipped stone biface of multi-colored jasper was reportedly found at the northwest end of the lake (S. Behnke 1973: personal communication to the Alaska Division of Parks).

- ANC-012 Anc 12. Two stone scrapers and a flake are reported from the location of a silo construction project along the Little Susitna River (S. Behnke 1973: personal communication to the Alaska Division of Parks).
- ANC-039 Meadow Creek Locality. Several clusters of cache pits, some containing bone and firecracked rocks, have been reported along Meadow Creek between Big Lake and Blodgett Lake (S. Behnke 1973: personal communication to the Alaska Division of Parks).
- ANC-052 Fish Creek Crossing. Seven cache pits were reported along Fish Creek draining Big Lake where a proposed Chugach Electric Powerline was to cross (Alaska Heritage Resources Survey 1974b).
- TYO-009 Tyo 9. Three house pits were reported approximately three and one-half miles above the mouth of Kroto Creek. One is reportedly eroding into the creek. The description does not fit with TYO-036 which is about three miles above the mouth (Behnke 1973: personal communication to the Alaska Division of Parks).
- TYO-012 Tyo 12. Area of about 200 cache pits on the east bank of Kroto Creek six or seven miles above the mouth (Behnke 1973: personal communication to the Alaska Division of Parks).
- Nancy Lake Village. This site is reported to be a historic Tanaina village, 60 to 70 years old. The location is unknown, but is reported to be in what is locally termed "Indian Bay" (Shem Pete. Billy Pete 1978: personal communication).
- Niklason Lake. A chipped stone projectile point fragment was reported found somewhere on the north shore of Niklason Lake near Palmer (Johnson 1976: personal communication).
- Red Shirt Lake Inlet. The existence of a village site at the inlet to Red Shirt Lake on its east shore was reported where a cabin now exists (Shem Pete 1978: personal communication).
- Cow Lake Village. A village was reported to exist on the north shore of Cow Lake near the outlet (Shem Pete 1978: personal communication).

INTERPRETATION

The lack of sufficient artifactual data within the study area almost precludes any interpretative discussion. Structural features, distributional data and linguistics do, however, allow us to make some assumptions about prehistory while examination of archaeology in adjacent areas can define some foreseeable occurrences.

The data at hand indicates a known culture history extending from the historic period back perhaps 1000 years within the area. Historic use of the area by Tanaina Athapaskans has been documented by Osgood (1966) and by information provided more recently by various Tanaina, particularly Shem Pete. Diamond and Mace (1968) and de Laguna (1975) have documented an occupation related to Kachemak III and later cultures dating back to ca. A.D. 1000. The remaining sites in the area are undated.

The multi-cellular cache pits at TYO-036 are, to this writer's knowledge, unparalleled anywhere in the Tanaina area. Comparable constructions have been cited from the Copper River drainage (Workman 1977: 33; Rainey 1939: 361). Any relationship between the Ahtna area pits and TYO-036 would be tenuous at best, but it is useful to speculate on ramifications of such a correspondence. The occurrence of similar cache pit types seems to indicate some movement of ideas (or population) between the two areas. Additionally, as Workman documented the late prehistoric age of the GUL-077 multi-cellular pits (i.e. Pit 28, A.D. 1735±135; Workman 1977: 30), such movements may be postulated in that same time period.

Presence of copper in the Fish Creek site collection was used by Dumond and Mace (1968: 17) to establish a time estimate of ca. A.D. 1700 for the associated occupation. That estimate was established through correlation with Kachemak IV copper artifacts and copper from other coastal sites. Workman dated copper implements of the same typological category at GUL-077 between A.D. 1190±125 and A.D. 1735±135 (1977: 30). Those dates apply to the entire occupation, not specifically the copper implements. A hammered fragment of copper found at Beluga Point (ANC-054) on Turnagain Arm dated A.D. 1160±120 (Reger 1978b: 9). The aspects common to all of the cited occurrences are (1) the early Second Millenium A.D. time frame and (2) the pure copper was either found in the Copper River area or was most probably obtained from there. These show a second line of evidence for close association between the Tanaina and Ahtna areas in late prehistoric times.

A third view of Tanaina-Ahtna closeness comes from linguistic data. Dr. James Kari has concluded from his studies of the Tanaina language that the area of his Iliamna-Inland linguistic subdivisions are the most likely area of great Tanaina antiquity (1975: 52). That impression is based on anachronisms in structure and lexicon of those subdivisions. He explains the correspondences between Ahtna and Upper Inlet Tanaina as recent influences from close physical association or assimilation (*ibid.*). The evidence seen in the archaeological report for late prehistoric ties between the Tanaina and Ahtna therefore compliments the linguistics, but neither explains antiquity, direction of trait flow, or manner of exchange.

Several archaeological sites peripheral to the study area contain materials dating from a very early time period. The Long Lake Wayside Site (ANC-017) in the Matanuska Canyon and Beluga Point (ANC-054) yielded a core and blade industry exhibiting apparent technological relationships with the Denali Complex or comparable materials. West (1975a: 80) has dated Denali Complex materials at ca. 10,000 years old and cites a date for the Long Lake core and blade material of ca. 6500 years ago (1975b: Figure 1).

With materials such as those found adjacent to the Willow-Wasilla study area, similar finds should occur in the immediate locale. Later cultural material of the type found at Beluga Point and having coastal affinities might also be expected to appear in the study area.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As the Susitna Basin Cooperative Study is intended to facilitate formulation of a broad scale plan of management guidelines, no specific site recommendations are now necessary. Those level of recommendations are more properly formulated at the more localized plan level. At the general level, areas of high site density should be identified and given special attention for their cultural importance. The cultural values should be given a level of consideration on a par with other primary values in the area (e.g. recreational fishing on Kroto Creek). Once the level-of-management decision is reached where specific sites will be affected, then determinations of effect and mitigation procedures must be considered. Areas of high archaeological concern which can be tentatively identified are: 1) the area around and between Red Shirt and Cow Lakes, 2) the lower 15 miles of Kroto Creek, and 3) the vicinity of Knik and the mouth of Fish Creek.

Federal or federally assisted actions which affect properties listed on, or eligible for listing on, the National Register of Historic Places must follow procedures in Title 36, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 800, "Procedures for the Protection of Historic and Cultural Properties." Sites thus far (12-15-78) listed on the National Register of Historic Places are identified on the accompanying maps with square symbols. They are: 1) the Knik Site, 2) the Wasilla Railroad Depot, and 3) Teeland's Country Store. Other properties in the study area are currently under consideration for inclusion in the National Register and the Office of the State Historic Preservation Officer should be contacted for the most up-to-date listing.

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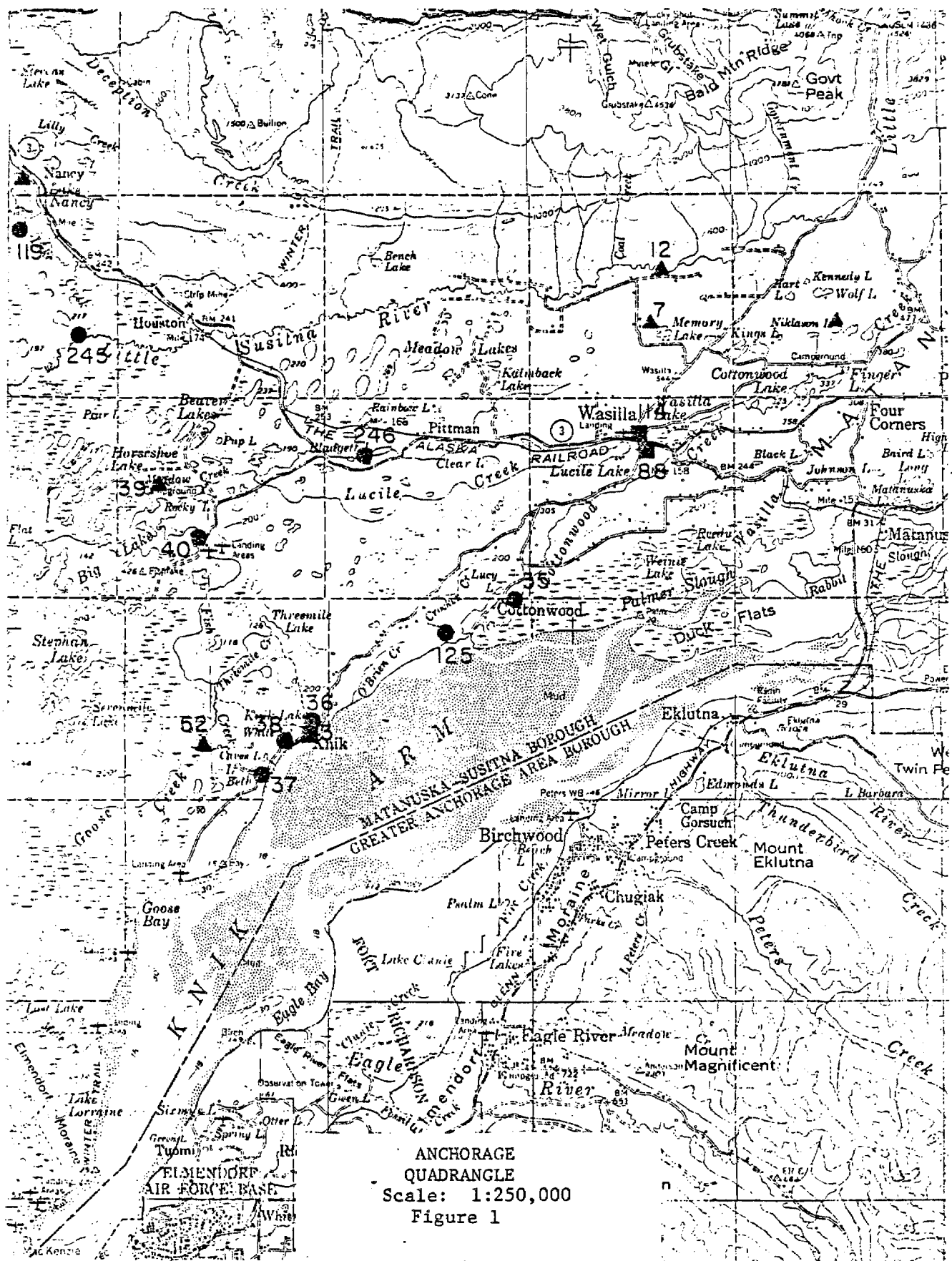
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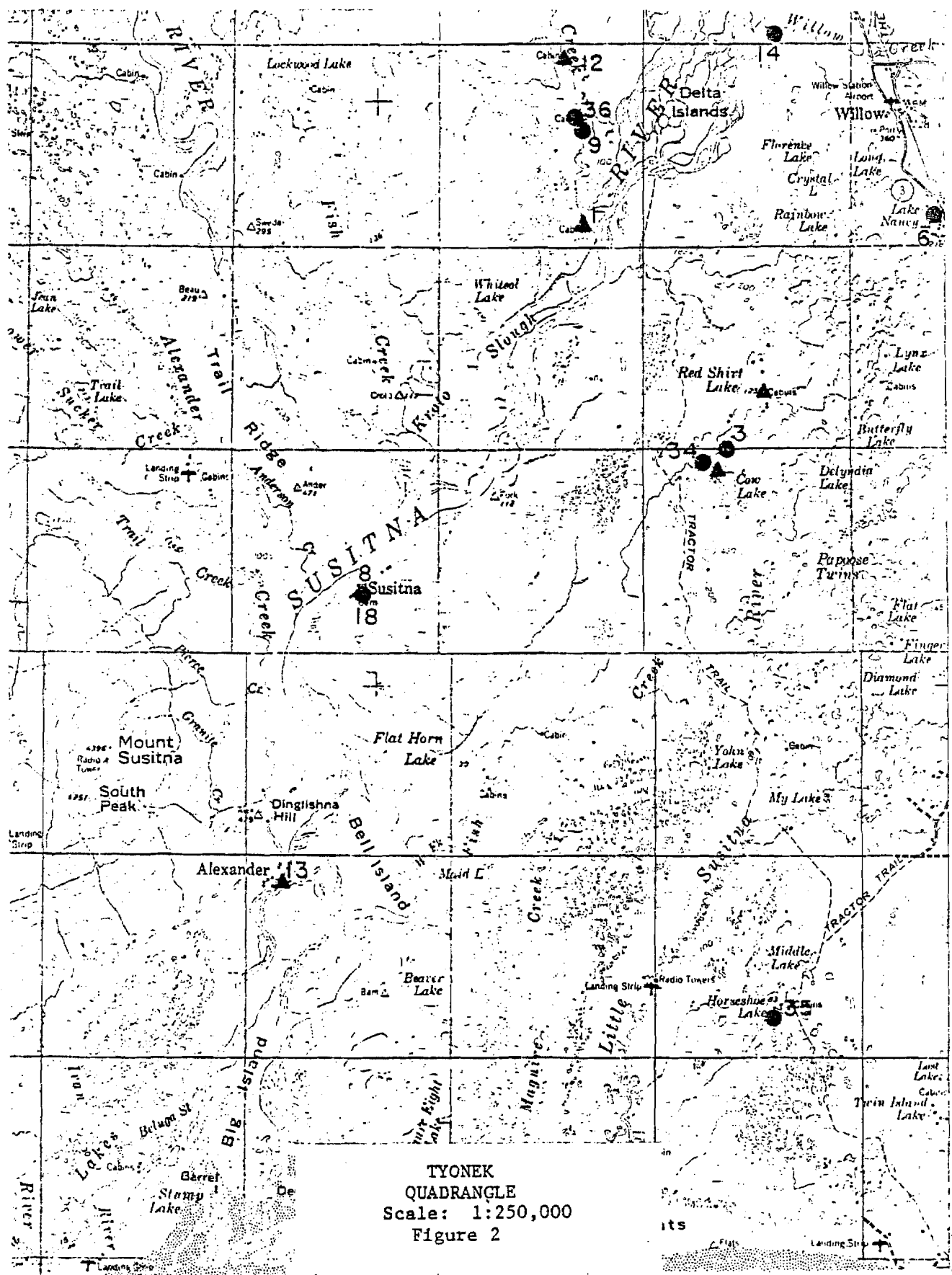
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Map Symbols Used in Figure 1 and Figure 2

- Confirmed Alaska Heritage Resources Survey Sites
- ▲ Reported Sites with Unconfirmed Existence or Locations
- National Register of Historic Places Properties





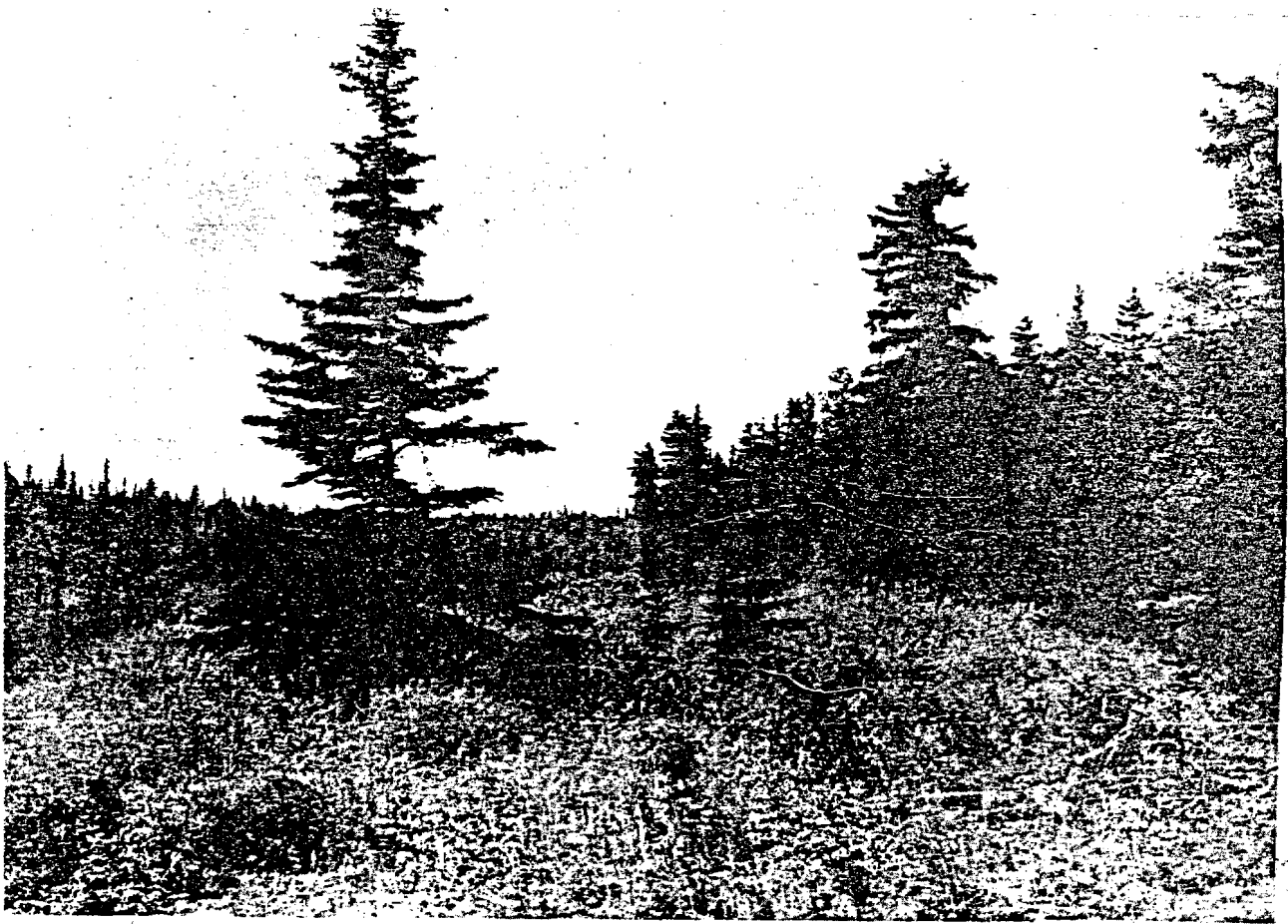


Figure 3 . Red Shirt Lake Village (TYO-003). View to south of Shem Pete cabin site. July, 1978, Alaska Division of Parks (ADP) Photo.

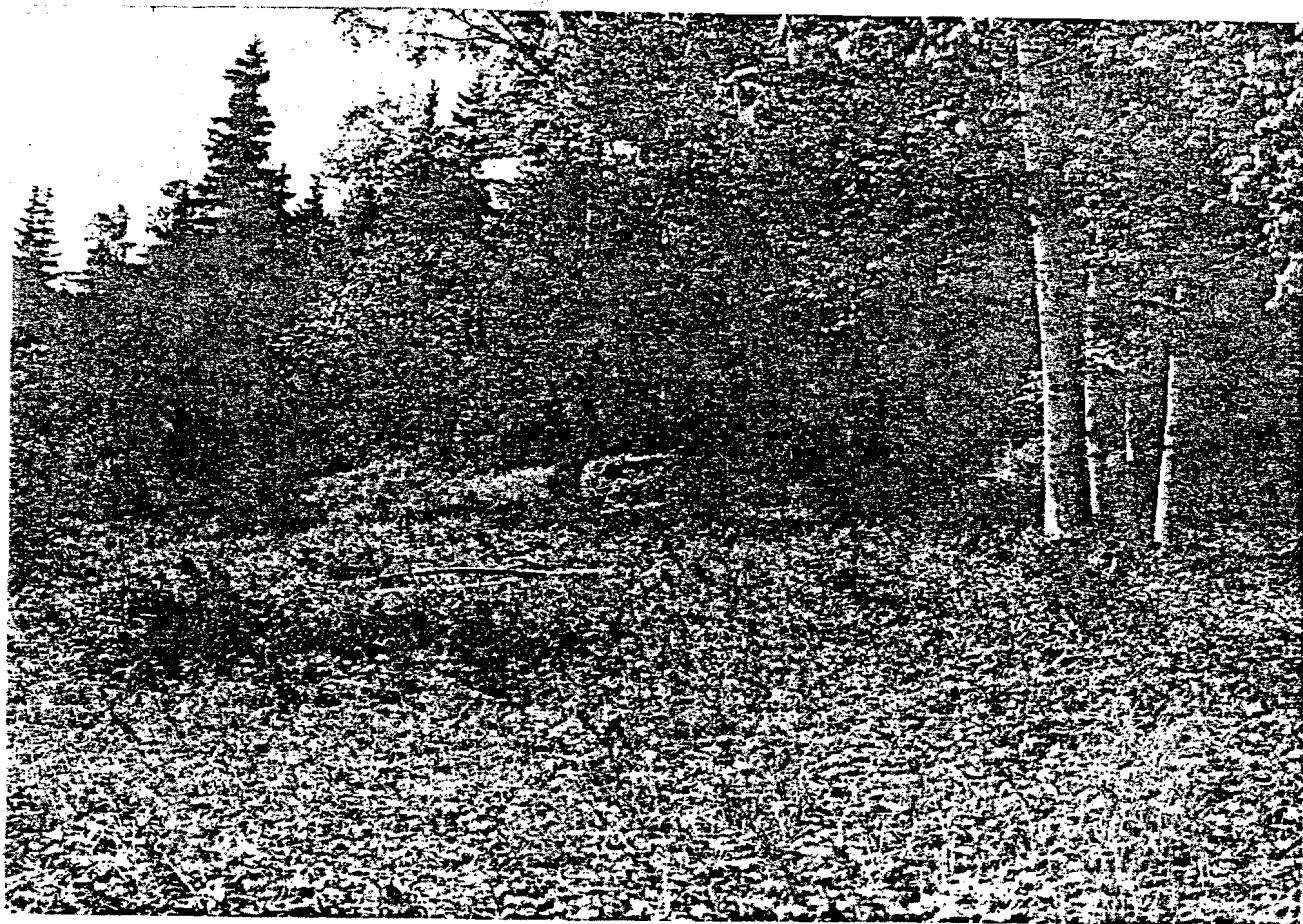


Figure 4 . Red Shirt Lake Village (TYO-003). View of depression behind Shem Pete cabin site. July, 1978, ADP Photo.



Figure 5. Red Shirt Lake Village (TYO-003). Shem Pete(right), Billy Pete(center), and Dr. James Kari(left) examining grave yard area for remains of grave houses. July, 1978, ADP Photo.

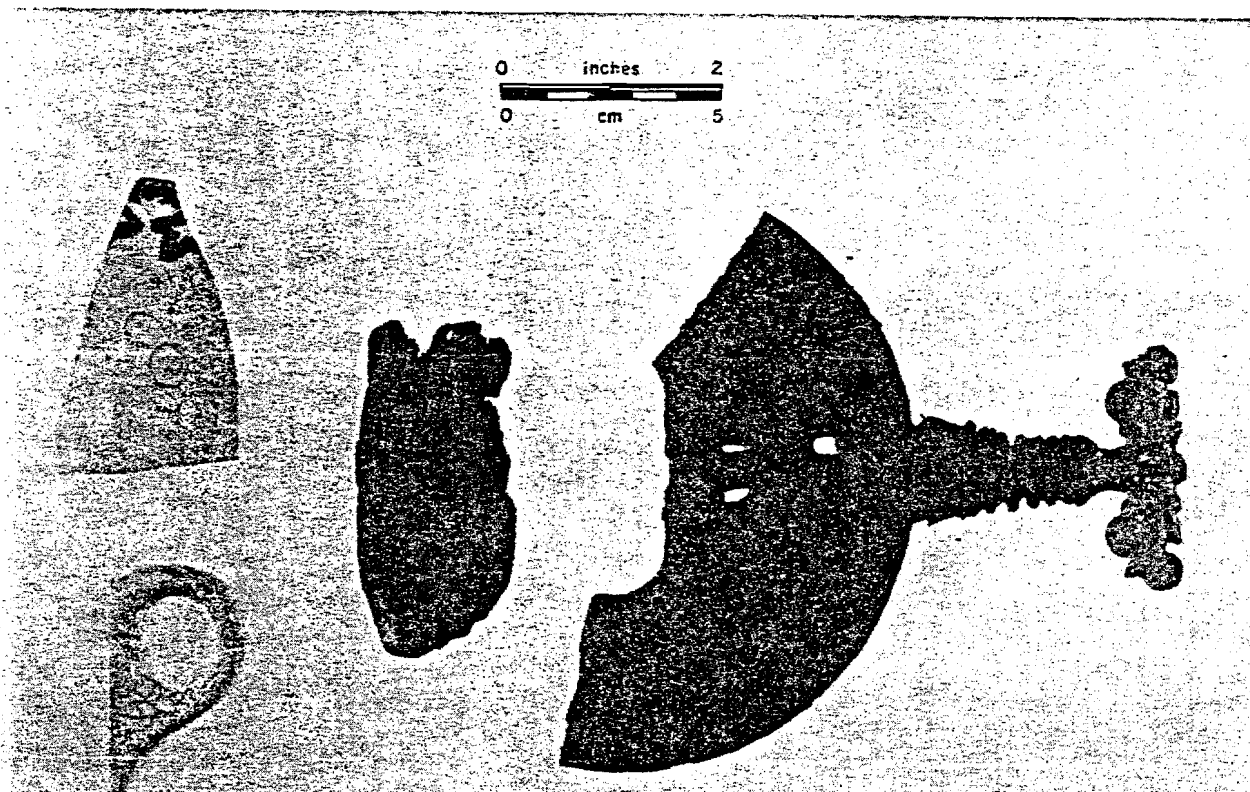


Figure 6 - Artifacts from the Red Shirt Lake area. Pottery fragments and bone chip—Fish Creek # 2(TYO-034), Stove pipe damper—Red Shirt Lake Village(TYO-003). December, 1978, ADP Photo.



Figure 7 . Aerial view of Fish Creek #2 (TYO-034). Site indicated by arrow. July, 1978, ADP Photo.



Figure 8. Cache pit at Horseshoe Lake Cache Site (TYO-035).
July, 1978, ADP Photo.

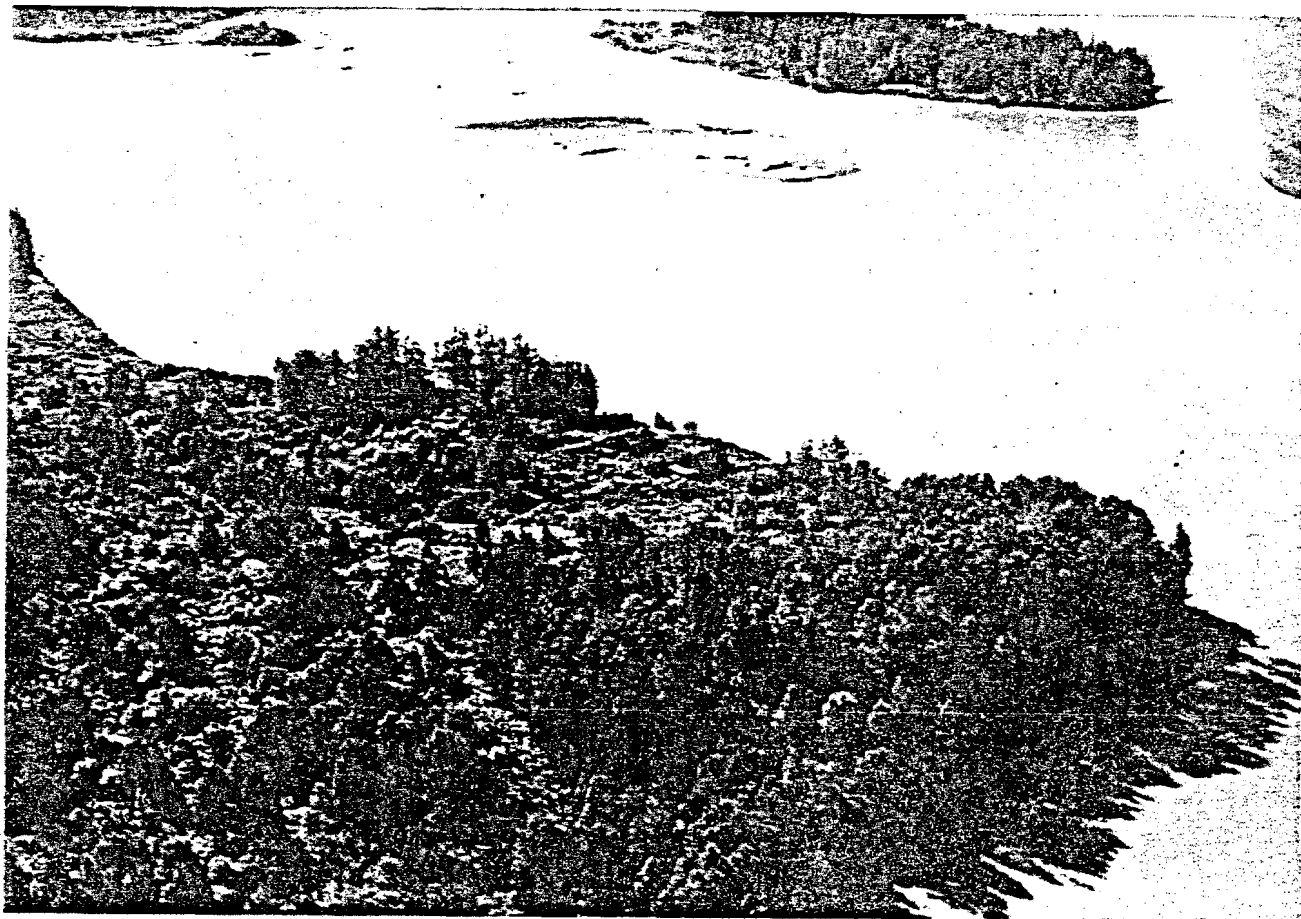


Figure 9. Susitna Station and Village (TYO-018). Aerial view to west. July, 1978, ADP Photo.

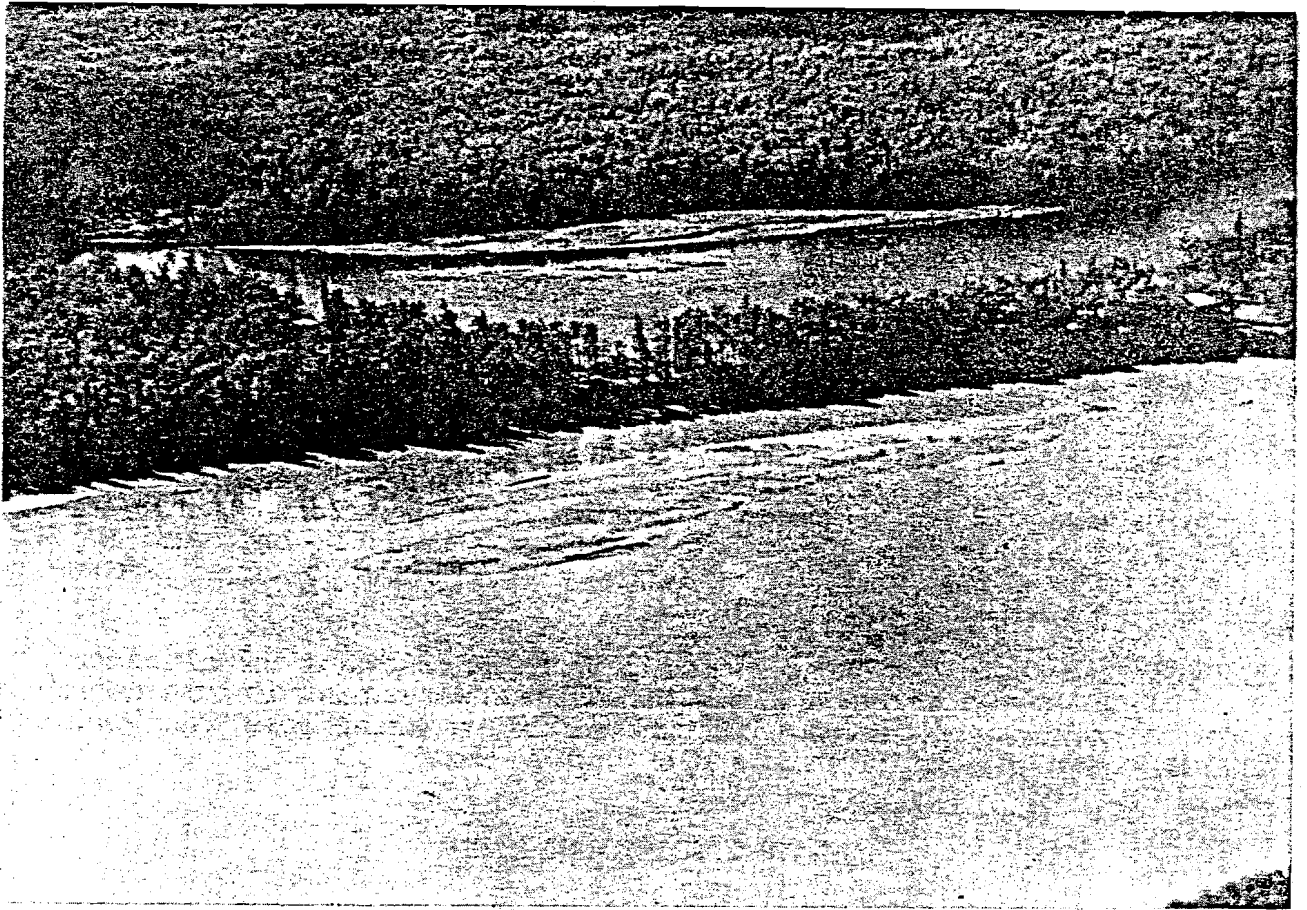


Figure 10. Alexander Village (TYO-013) with Susitna River in foreground and Alexander Creek in background. July, 1978, ADP Photo.