

Attending the 2015 Nunalleq Archaeological Field School offered by the University of Aberdeen in Quinhagak, Alaska for one month this summer was one of the best learning experiences I have ever had. Having never been on an archaeological dig before, I was not entirely sure what to expect. I was worried I had not brought the correct gear, that I may have difficulty adjusting to life at camp, and that I might not be as knowledgeable about archaeology as some of my fellow field school students. But soon after I arrived in Quinhagak and met the team my concerns dissipated. Everyone was very friendly and the field school director, Dr. Charlotta Hillerdal, and the site director, Dr. Rick Knecht, were very patient and knowledgeable teachers. Although the first day on site was tough (we spent all day shoveling out the previous year's backfill), the magic of being in a foreign locale had yet to fade so my spirits remained high. And after the first week or so I felt like I was finally getting the hang of what I was doing and it was easy to fall into routine.

I once overheard Dr. Knecht describing the Nunalleq site as the "Troy of the region," which I feel is a fairly apt description. Like Troy, the giant sod house complex that comprised the Nunalleq site (which was inhabited between roughly 1000 and 1600 CE), was razed by attackers during what the local oral tradition has dubbed the "Bow and Arrow Wars." Because the site was burned down, much of the material culture inside remained fairly well preserved; not a single day passed where we did not find an amazing museum-quality artifact. Some of these finds included intact ulu knives with wooden handles fashioned in the shape of seals or whales, ornate ivory and bone earrings, and beautifully carved wooden dolls. The greatest find of the season, however, was a

ceremonial Yup'ik mask in pristine condition. The face carved into the mask was eerily lifelike and included two ivory labrets, one on each side of the lower lip.

I had the chance to dig all over the site, which taught me a lot about how to identify different sorts of contexts. I thoroughly enjoyed digging at the house floor level, as that is where the majority of the artifacts were found; however, I also found trowelling through the burned and the collapse layers to be very interesting as well as it taught me how to become cognizant of subtle difference in the soil. Some of my favourite parts of field school occurred outside of the site, though. For instance, I had the opportunity to sit in on an interview conducted by anthropologist Anna Sloan where she discussed gender roles in Yup'ik culture with local elders. I was also able to shadow paleontologist Dr. Veronique Forbes as she collected beetles out in the tundra. I found Dr. Forbes work to be especially interesting; she is comparing present insect fauna to preserved insect remains found in the site to gain a better understanding of what each room in the house complex was used for during its occupation.

I am very thankful to have been selected by the Archaeological Institute of America to receive the Jane C. Waldbaum Field School Scholarship. I used all of the money to help cover the cost of the field school tuition. I hope that the skills that I have acquired and the friends that I have gained at the Nunalleq Field School will pave the way for me to engage in similar excavations in the future.







