

Proposed Title

Paleoethnobotany in Interior Alaska

Abstract

Vegetation and plant resources can impact forager mobility and subsistence strategies. However, misconceptions about the preservation of organics in subarctic archaeological contexts and underestimations of the importance of plant resources to foraging societies limit paleoethnobotanical research in high-latitude environments. Research on subsistence practices of foraging societies has been limited by a narrow range of research questions relating to site-specific plant resources, use, and deposition and taphonomy. The model developed in this thesis establishes expectations of seasonal archaeological assemblages characteristic for Late Pleistocene and Holocene sites. High-latitude macroremains found in or on the Upward Sun River site (approximately 13,300 and 11,500 Cal BP, respectively) in the Tanana River basin, central Alaska.

Site-specific methods included bulk sampling for macroremains in the field, subsampling in the laboratory, and analysis. Measures of density, diversity, and ubiquity tied together the regional expectations and the results from the Upward Sun River site. The dominance of common herbaceous plants in the component 1 area of the site suggests that site occupants may have focused on mitigating the risk of starvation by focusing foraging efforts on seasonally abundant and storable resources that could be stored for future use. The high density of plant remains in the component 1 area could indicate long-term occupation of the site that extends beyond the summer season. The site occupants' opportunistic foraging strategy of targeting predictable plant resources such as low-bush arctic heather, blueberries, and

This thesis contributes to previous research at the Upward Sun River site and suggests that Late Pleistocene and Early Holocene foragers had a broad diet that included large and small game, fish, waterfowl, and plant resources. This research illustrates the importance of plant resources in interior Alaska and draws attention to aspects of human behavior that are difficult to address with lithic or faunal datasets alone, such as the gendered division of labor.