

Places of Arctic Traditional Healing (PATH)

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Introduction

In 2004 the eight-nation Arctic Council's working group on the Conservation for Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF) produced a report on the sacred sites of the indigenous peoples of Russia (CAFF, 2004). This report provided a template for a similar assessment of the Places of Arctic Traditional Healing in the US Arctic. This area is quite large and if a map of Alaska is superimposed on the contiguous 48 states with Anchorage located near St. Louis, then the area that is being investigated for PATH would cover the states of Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa and Kansas.

While some Alaska Native groups in the southeastern portion of the state have erected large totem poles to signify special places and relationships to the land, the Alaska Natives of the Arctic were challenged in that there are no large trees for markers on their own, and without trees moving large rocks is not possible. There are sites that are

marked with large marine mammal bones; most often whale skulls, jaw bones and vertebra.

Some places are known as they have continually been used. Some have been identified and new structures have been built at the site. Some sites are known today because notable events are witnessed at them such as ice points, the aurora at zenith or the midnight sun from promontories well south of the Arctic Circle. Some sites were used intermittently for celebrations. However, sites not regularly used can disappear from sight as wind and water erodes them, or as permafrost heaves the ground creating what appears to be circular patterns of stone rings that could be perceived as tent rings, but that are merely the freeze thaw pattern as larger rocks are forced to the surface in circles.

Upon preliminary investigation, based on the CAFF report, what was learned was there is currently no inventory of sacred places in the US Arctic. In order to move forward a standardized form and definitions have been prepared and the process of collecting information was begun.

The PATH Form and Definitions

PLACES OF ARCTIC TRADITIONAL HEALING – PATH

COLLECTED BY:

COLLECTED ON: (Day / Month / Year)

COLLECTED AT: (Collection / Citation / Record)

CODE NUMBER: (K4K2A001)

PLACE NAME: (English / Indigenous (which language) / Common / Others)

FEATURE: (Physical, Environmental, Spiritual)

LOCATION: (Alaska Native Region)

(General description)

(Nearest ZIP code)

(Lat./Long. – GPS as the confidential identifier and not for public use)

TRADITIONAL UTILIZATION: (Physical, Medicinal, Spiritual, Mental / description)

TRADITIONAL USER: (Sufferer, Family, Healer)

CONTEMPORARY UTILIZATION: (No, Unknown, Yes with description)

CURRENT LAND OWNERSHIP:

CURRENT POTENTIAL FOR LOSS: (Erosion, Development, Access)

Code - K4K2A001 means

K – Knowledge of PATH

4 – 2004 (0-9)

K – November (Months A-L)

2 – 2nd week of the month (1-4)

A – ANCSA 14 (h)1 lands collection (M = MMS, P = NPS, L = Published

Literature, O = Oral tradition)

001 – the first entry (1- 1,000)

Therefore all K will be arranged in chronological order of collection and can be sorted by collection source (the fifth item), Files will be kept as Word files so they can be searched by word.

Physical – Places that were good for healing the body such as hot springs, tidal areas, camps away from the village, places for sweat houses, birth houses, journey paths to secure items or knowledge.

Medicinal – Places that were used for the collection or preparation of healing products such as plants (fresh, dried, ashed, poked), minerals (soil, crystals, talisman, jade for surgical knives), water (ocean, fresh, spring), animals (blood, organ tissue, skin, marrow, sinew, talisman), human (blood, milk, urine, saliva, breath, hair)

Spiritual – Places that were used for entering the spirit world, engaging spiritual strength or in a quest, or were noted as having spirits present in the form of ghosts or other entities.

Mental – Places that were used for training traditional healers or for gaining insight or clairvoyance.

Erosion – Flooding, coastal or river erosion, thermokarst subsidence, frost heave, earthquake subsidence, volcanic ash or lava overlay

Development – construction at site or promotion of an alternative use of the site.

Access – land ownership restrictions of site or over the lands leading to the site, cultural temporal or spatial restrictions of use or for purpose.

Security of the sites is of critical importance. The exact locations are not to be published. The exact descriptions are generalized so as to allow for an awareness of the value of the site without attracting “pot-hunters.”

Inventory Development Process

In 1998 the Alaska Native Science Commission contracted to have a report prepared on unpublished collections of traditional knowledge as they needed to be identified, protected and archived when possible (Hild, 1998). The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) 14(h)(1) materials were part of the concern. The Federal support to house and maintain that collection had been cut. There were plans being made to box up the collection and store it out of state. This would not have been an active collection in an accessible archive, but boxes collecting dust in a distant warehouse.

Under ANCSA Alaska Native villages and regional corporations were allowed to request lands of special importance in addition to the traditionally used and economically developable lands that were conveyed. Several thousand sites were identified and in the end over two thousand were inventoried by the BIA ANCSA Realty Office staff of archeologists and anthropologists. Many of the sites were burial areas and traditional camps during seasonal migrations to gather food. However, some sites were specified as having had been used for medicinal or healing purposes.

The process began in the early 1970s by having Alaska Native organizations submit some 3,800 recommendations to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The BLM staff then conducted a pre-adjudication process to determine if the request was on private land, restricted government land such as military bases, on individual Native allotment requests, or on village or Alaska Native regional corporation lands. Each of these types of ownership had priority over a 14(h)1 classification. If the recommended site fell on available appropriate Federal lands then it was passed along to the BIA for review. Approximately 2,200 sites were passed along. It is unclear as of this writing if the

background material on the other 1,600 sites still exists and if so how to retrieve it from its suspected repository within the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) offices in Anchorage, Alaska. Conversations suggest they are held at NARA, however no one has yet specified how to identify and access these former BLM files.

The ANSCA 14(h)1 set aside lands information collection process has documented Alaskan places that have been identified by its indigenous people as being special. There are just as many reasons for the classification of these plots of land as there are reasons for any place to be special. Each contains a story. Most have historical significance. All are viewed in a way that provides a definition of a special place.

The “whys” and “hows” of each of these identified places have been carefully gathered and recorded within the ANSCA collection. The materials that have been collected are rich in potential for a wide variety of users. These are not merely descriptions of real estate. There is oral history from Alaska Native cultures. There are artifacts. There are personal experiences. There is insight into the diversity of cultures and worldviews. There is a wealth of information if it is considered in context.

Place of Arctic Traditional Healing

Alaska Natives have had special places for healing. There were places and times for the collection of herbs and plants. Certain animals were taken and specific parts used. Journey quests for self-healing included going to particular locations and included the gathering of special plants or stones.

Some locations were special in themselves. Hot springs exist throughout Alaska and were used in combination with manipulation, instructed activities and application of herbal treatments (Griffin,1988)(Griffin & Sattler, 1988). In addition markers were made

at some locations that are not dissimilar from the stone monuments of Europe. The geomancy of these sites is yet to be investigated.

The Inupiat, the indigenous people of northwest Alaska, perceive a world that is more than just interconnected pieces, it is seen as one (Bielawski, 1995; Burch, 1971; Carpenter, 1980; Fitzhugh & Kaplan, 1982; Freeman, Morgan & Farquhar, 2001; Weyer, 1932). The people's name is defined as "Inua" - spirit and "piat" - real. The Inupiat are the manifestation of spirit. They cannot separate themselves from the Inua that is all. The western European scientific worldview is that all matter sprang from a common source in the big bang (Hawkins, 1988). In the practical daily application of science, the process is conducted through the atomization of the cosmos in order to understand the whole through its myriad of physical parts. The Inupiat see the whole through the spirit of Inua that is everything. By knowing who they are, they know the whole and therefore understand its aspects. They perceive and relate to the world in wholeness through respect and sharing (Hubert, 1994). They do not see themselves as a part or separate from the whole. They know that all live and thrive as one.

Alaskan ethnographies report healers going to special sites marked with stones or large bones to engage in spirit communication as part of the ritual journey to well-being (Ganley, 1996; Lowenstein, 1992, 1994; Milan, 1964; Spencer, 1969). Sites that are known to have been used may now have limitations to their access due to land "ownership" politics (Crespi, 1991; Ganley, 2002; National Parks Service, 2003, n.d.; Occhipinti, 2000). Seeing and knowing that the world around them is healthy and accessible is integral to the perception of Inupiat personal well-being.

Shamanism among the Inupiat

Historically there were two distinct types of Inupiat shaman. Over the past century there evolved a composite healer that utilized traditional techniques in part, but was also acceptable to the western European medical systems and Christian faith that now so strongly influences behavior in Alaska.

The most well known shamanic type was known as *anatkuk* (Ganley, 1996). This is the Inupiaq term for shaman, healer, medicine man, or sorcerer. These individuals worked in an open, public process that was often quite flamboyant in nature. They became powerful and were feared as they set taboo and regulated behavior.

Most *anatkuk* worked as specialists. Few had advanced healing skills in all practices, not unlike physicians today. The most common skills were in three general categories. One was manipulating or poking the body's joints, organs and blood system to provide a physical advantage to healing, not unlike an osteopathic physician or acupuncturist. One was working with medicinal plants and animals to provide chemical advantages in healing, not unlike a pharmacist with a physician prescribing pills. One was working with spirits of ancestors, animals and the non-physical world to provide a spiritual advantage to healing, not unlike a religious leader or faith healer.

There are reports of *anatkuk* performing eye surgery in the 1800s to remove growths such as pterygium. They reportedly used a human louse suspended on human hair to scratch away the tissue, or through the use of a fine jade knife to cut away the material that was interfering with vision (DeLapp & Ward, 1981). Their skills were remarkable for many of the services that they provided.

The *anatkuk* became the target of repression by missionaries and later by the medical establishment. The flamboyant nature of these shamans made them targets.

Those who practiced publicly and in contrast to, or in conflict with, the new philosophies were seen as contrary to public well-being and were disempowered or even killed (Eliade, 1974; Ganley, 1996). The anatguk was defined and described by the missionaries as the devil and some oral histories include the physical description of horns and spiked tail associated to both a traditional evil Arctic spirit as well as to the Inupiat anatguk shaman (Burch, 1971).

There was a second and relatively unknown historic shaman as well, the ilisiilaq (Ganley, 1996). This is the Inupiaq term for a sorcerer. This shaman worked in private and stayed out of the limelight that was so desired by the anatguk. The ilisiilaq was not considered malevolent in most areas, whereas the anatguk was associated with fear and taboos. The ilisiilaq worked quietly, behind the scenes conducting spiritual journeys for interventions so that individuals could be successful in providing for their family and community. This shaman was considered clairvoyant in their ability to know about what was taking place, as well as a being a healer of the spirit. It is the ilisiilaq that would foretell the outcome of a birth, hunting season or a season's weather pattern.

Over the last half of the twentieth century, a new form of traditional healer emerged (Ganley, 1996). The English name is that of a traditional healer, or tribal doctor. The term shaman is not used, and is actively avoided as its connotation is still closely associated with taboos, the evil anatguk and the Christian concept of the devil. This healer was formed as a composite of some of the more acceptable aspects of both of the historical shamanic figures to the new dominant culture. The physical body manipulation and chemicals derived through plant use were combined with the private delivery of service and information.

The Inuipaq term for this healer of composite skills is ilnuunniaqti which is close to meaning “traditional doctor.” Such a healer performs various tasks such as kapi – poking (drawing blood at sites similar to acupuncture points) or massage, ilusiiq – setting dislocations, and uniiuqtit – the manipulation of organs to allow for easing of perceived blockages to their normal functioning. The ilnuunniaqti also prepare poultices, wound dressings and infusions. The current level of knowledge of ethno-botanicals and ethno-zoonotics is held by these individuals. The hospitals and clinics have requested that these ethno-pharmaceuticals not be used until there is a greater understanding of their potential drug interactions (DeLapp & Ward, 1981). Likewise the manipulation of organs and poking, have been advised to be halted as they are perceived to be risky behaviors.

Slowly the anatguk’s skills, while being modified and provided in a subtle manner in private, are being revived (Craig, 1998). Those who have practiced quietly, in ways viewed as complementary to the dominant medical and religious understanding, have been able to continue. In two communities in Alaska, there are formal traditional healing programs associated with clinics and hospitals. These programs also have apprenticeship programs that are preparing the next generation of traditional healers.

Some PATH Inventory Site Examples

Example one – “Ground is twisting” is the literal translation of the Inupiat name. It is an area where the geology has allowed uneven rocky terrain to be exposed. This area was well suited for the anatguk to build stone animal traps for fox and wolf. When the animal was captured then it could be processed to make medicines or provide protective amulets.

Example two – Itiuyaaq means “spirit igloo.” This location was marked by a large whale vertebra and placed near a ground squirrel burrow. This was used by an ilisiilaq or anatguk as an entry place for spirit travel. Such a place could be used to learn of impending patterns or animal movement or weather as well as the outcome of a hunt or pregnancy. It could also provide a location to deal with spirits who were perceived to be upset due to a broken taboo or who may have been sent by an unfriendly source.

Example three- Iyat means “cooking pot” and is known in English as Serpentine Hot Springs. It is located within National Parks Service lands. There is a sound history of the site that includes shamanic training, divination, and induction for apprentices. It is a site that has continually been used by the inuunniqti. Frequent trips by Tribal Doctors bring patients to soak in the hot water that allows for greater manipulation of joints and the abdominal cavity.

The current PATH inventory has several dozen sites and is growing. It will take time to gather the materials together and assure that they contain quality information. Looking for PATH takes on a new perspective in the Arctic where sunrise can take place either due north or due south as well as any degree to the east. It is a place where the full moon can be seen at noon and the sun at midnight. With such a literal world view the cultural world view can be equally as diverse and so PATH can appear in extraordinary situations and places.

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