

Alaska Heritage Resources Survey

Alaska Office of History and Archaeology

For further information contact the Alaska Office of History and Archaeology at (907) 269-8721

Compiled: Tue Nov 12 06:41:37 AKST 2019

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AHRS Number: KTZ-00304

Site Name: KTZ-00304

Site Description: A whale vertebra marks the northwest corner of this 160 m by 25 m site which consists of nine house depressions and at least 20 cache pits on top of a relict beach ridge known as E 6. KTZ-304 preserves the oldest remains of houses on a cluster of beach ridges at the end of the Cape Espenberg spit. Dating to as early as 800-1000 AD this site contains evidence of the Birnirk to Thule transition period. As one moves from beach ridge E6 to the younger ridges of E5 and E 4, archaeologists have demonstrated sequential use and the cultural evolution of artifacts and house structures through time (Darwent et al. 2013), but little is known about the Birnirk to Thule transition and what conditions prompted this cultural evolution. Research at Cape Espenberg and KTZ-304 has focused on understanding the role of climate change, diffusion and population replacement in this transition. Intensive archaeological investigations began at KTZ-304 in 2009 with the Hoffecker and Mason Cape Espenberg project. In 2010 these researchers began the excavation of feature 21 and in 2011 feature 12. In 2010 work in feature 21 was halted when the remains of a human skeleton was discovered. Feature 12 was left unfinished in 2011 as the season came to a close and frozen ground and general complexity of the house structure prevented the archaeologists from completing their excavation. A total of 16 radiocarbon dates place the timing of the occupations between 800-1200 A.D. The following paraphrases the Cape Espenberg reports by Hoffecker and Mason (2010; 2011) to detail the extent of the excavations and highlights of the most important finds to date. Feature 21 was partially excavated on Ridge E-6. Within an 8 x 14 meter site excavation grid, two blocks of units were opened. The excavation unit blocks measured 3 x 4 meters (north room) and 3 x 5 meters (south room); the south block was later expanded by three units, bringing the total excavated area at Feature 21 to 30 m². Feature 21 yielded a total of 1,352 artifacts and approximately 18,700 faunal remains. Among the artifacts are 670 pottery fragments, 1 ceramic lamp, 10 amber beads, 5 antler arrow-points, 4 leister prongs, 1 fish lure (ivory), 1 shovel (made from a walrus scapula), 2 mattocks, 2 sealing harpoons (ivory), 1 wound pin, 12 slate ulu blades, 7 chert bifaces, 2 microblades, and 365 pieces of chert waste (from Hoffecker and Mason 2010). In 2011, 50 square meters of Feature 12 were excavated to a depth between 50 cm to 1 meter. A 40 to 50 cm layer of burned bone, charcoal and pottery fragments were encountered directly under the sod layer in the northeast corner or the excavation. A cut portion of a bowhead whale mandible stood upright in the northeast corner with two to three logs lying close by, possibly structural supports for a freestanding kitchen or disposal midden. This feature was separated from the house by 10 cm of sand. In the western part of the excavation, another burnt area the encountered that probably post-dates the house occupation (from Hoffecker and Mason 2011). A 2.5 x 2.5 m one-room house structure was encountered in the northern portion of the excavation block with long wooden structural elements possibly representing a floor, along with a builders trench and at least two superposed house structures. The upper floor of the house was built of logs. A possible 50 cm wide bench was composed of long horizontal wood elements. A sandy area with a hearth separated the possible bench from the main living floor. Three small upright posts of unknown function were located 50 cm inside the structural margins. Excavation south of the main room of the house revealed two separate features, a collapsed teepee-like structure and a number of horizontal logs (from Mason et al. 2011). Separated from the upper house feature by a thin layer of sand and roof fill was an older structure marked by three clearly defined logs around the perimeter.

Site Significance: This site retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. The site remains in its original location on top of the Cape Espenberg beach ridge known as E-6 reflecting the choice of the occupants to establish their habitation close to the subsistence resources that they relied upon. The houses were designed for the extreme cold and wind that this location experiences. The setting of the whale shaped ridge may have had significance to the inhabitants. The materials used in the house construction reflect what was available on this treeless cape. The workmanship illustrates the skill required to construct a building using lithic technology. The site maintains the feeling and association of this particular setting on a remote arctic cape and the people who lived here. KTZ-304 is eligible under Criterion D in the area of prehistoric archeology. The substantial depositional integrity has the potential to provide information about subsistence, habitation, landscape use and trade during the time period. SHPO concurred (February 2016).

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Associations:

Informal Associations:

Location Info: On top of a relict beach ridge known as E 6, at the end of the Cape Espenberg spit.

Location Reliability: Location exact and site existence verified (1)

Mapsheet(s): KOTZEBUE C-4 (KTZC4)

MTRS(s): K013N023W03

Point Representation: Lat: 66.5572248, Long: -163.62286696

Geometry Accuracy: No

AHRS Resource Nature: Site (A site is a location of significance)

Resnat Subtype: Default Site

Resource Keywords: Wood, bone, ceramic, stone, metal, HOUSE depressions, cache pits

Acreage: 1

Period(s): Prehistoric

Associated Dates: 800-1200 AD; 600 AD (bronze buckle)

Cultural Affiliation: Birnirk or Thule

Current Function(s):

Historic Function(s):

Condition Code: Normal state of weathering, undisturbed by vandalism, construction or abnormal weathering such as flooding or earthquakes (A)

Danger(s) of Destruction: Unknown

Destruct Year:

Property Owner: Bering Land Bridge National Preserve

Source Reliability: Professional reports, records and field studies (A)

Assigned To: MASON, OWEN

Date Issued: 04-23-2007

Card Status: Complete

Other Number(s):

Attachments: none

Determinations of Eligibility: 1

DOE Status: Determined eligible by SHPO and agency (DOE-S)

SHPO Action:

SHPO Action Date: 02-11-2016

SHPO Action Comments:

Distinctive Features:

Period of Significance: 800-1200 AD; 600 AD (bronze buckle), Holocene

Area Significance(s): Archaeology, Prehistoric

Criteria: Yielded or may yield important relevant information (D)

Considerations:

Filed As: 3130-1R NPS, 3330-6 KTZ-000304

Comments:

National Register Nominations: none

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Document Repository References: 3

(02/11/2016) NPS/Devenport, D.

Title: Archaeological Research at select sites within Cape Espenberg in Bering Land Bridge National Preserve

Document Repository Record ID = 16355562, (4 attached files)

KTZ-094 DOE final.pdf

KTZ-157 DOE final.pdf

KTZ-304 DOE final.pdf

FA996.pdf

(12/01/1999) NLUR/Bowers, P.M., Williams, C.M., Mason, O., Mills, R.

Title: Preliminary Report On The 1999 Deering Village Safe Water Archaeological Program. Prepared by Bowers, et al.

Document Repository Record ID = 6822, (1 attached files)

00001CE1.pdf

(05/01/2005) NLUR/Bowers, P.M., Newton, J.I.M., Reuther, J.D., Williams, C.M.

Title: Interim Report On The Deering Village Safe Water Archaeological Program. Prepared By Bowers et al. December 2004, Revised May 2005.

Document Repository Record ID = 6823, (1 attached files)

00001CE6.pdf

References: none