Digging up the past

Students at this summer’s archaeological field school near the Gerstle River spent five weeks sifting through thousands of artifacts dating back to some of the continent’s first inhabitants.

Assistant Professor Ben Potter, who’s been involved with the site since the mid-90s, said their discoveries are globally significant.

“The site has a number of qualities that are extremely rare in the subarctic, whether in North America or Asia,” Potter said. “First of all, we have incredibly good preservation of organic materials that typically deteriorate in acidic soils of boreal forest settings. Another reason it’s important is that it’s extremely well stratified. The soil lays down like a layer cake, which helps us identify specific occupations and the artifacts that are associated with each other.”

Potter also said that the site is unusual in the number of artifacts unearthed.

“To this point I think we have around 10,000 to 12,000 fragments of stone tools and some of the tools themselves,” he said. “We’ve probably got about 500 tools that we’ve found so far in our excavations. For all of these reasons, it’s an extremely significant site.”

For their work at the site, which consisted of digging eight hours a day, six days a week for five weeks, students earned six academic credits.

Thomas Allen, an undergraduate anthropology major from Fairbanks, was particularly impressed with what he was helping to find at the Gerstle River site.

“Stones and bones are cool, but what they can actually tell you about what people were doing here 10,000 years ago, that’s really why I’m out here.”

— Thomas Allen, anthropology major

Susan Butcher Institute names founding director

UAF has created the Susan Butcher Institute, a program that aims to cultivate public service and leadership skills in Alaska residents. Butcher’s husband, David Monson (pictured below), will serve as the institute’s first executive director. He will develop a range of programs intended to inspire people, especially youths and emerging leaders, to improve their own communities through public service, volunteerism and taking on new challenges. The institute expects to offer a wide variety of workshops and seminars starting in fall 2010.

LARS opens barn doors

Muskoxen, caribou and reindeer greeted more than 600 visitors at the spring open house at the Institute of Arctic Biology Robert G. White Large Animal Research Station.

The station hosts the annual event to give the public a chance to see the spring calves and learn about large-animal science before the station officially opens for the summer.

Visitors saw how ultrasound is used to assess animal body condition and witnessed how muskoxen digest the coarse woody plants that make up their diet at interactive science displays hosted by scientists and students. Guides stationed along the tour path provided a running commentary of natural history about the animals and the facility.

Decades of observing the restless Earth

For the last 20 years, Alaska has been a safer place, despite being home to more than 30 historically active volcanoes. This security comes from the service and research conducted by a team of scientists with the Alaska Volcano Observatory, a joint project among the UAF Geophysical Institute, the U.S. Geological Survey and the Alaska Division of Geological and Geophysical Surveys. The observatory was founded in 1988, just 18 months before the eruption of Mount Redoubt in Southcentral Alaska.

Agriculture in action

Summer visitors to Fairbanks were able to see agricultural research in progress via a collaborative project between the School of Natural Resources and Agricultural Sciences and the greenhouse at Pike’s Waterfront Lodge.

Research professional Jeff Werner (pictured above) and Professor Meriam Karlsson headed the project, which examined how to grow sustainable food crops in rural communities. Werner and Karlsson designed the greenhouse and a teaching tool to explore planting and operating techniques. Local farmers and teachers helped design the facility.

For their work at the site, which consisted of digging eight hours a day, six days a week for five weeks, students earned six academic credits.
New ‘Nook leaders

Home ice advantage

UAF alumnus Dallas Ferguson is the new head coach for the Alaska Nanook hockey team. Ferguson was a four-year letter winner in his days as a player for the Nanooks and served as team captain during his senior year in 1996. His post-college career includes four years as a pro, two years as an assistant coach for the Fairbanks Ice Dogs and four years as the Nanooks’ assistant coach.

“Dallas has the plan, passion and broad support necessary to provide a foundation that Nanook hockey has been missing.”
— UAF athletic director Forrest Karr

Seasoned veteran joins the team

Darryl Smith, a 17-year coaching veteran, was selected in July as the new head coach for the women’s basketball team. Smith’s experience includes 13 combined years as a head coach at Metropolitan State College of Denver, Wichita State University and Butler Community College. Most recently, he served as assistant coach for the NCAA Division I University of Nevada. Smith has a 267-163 career record, including four conference championships and four NCAA tournament bids.

“Darryl’s passion for teaching and learning is instantly recognizable.”
— UAF athletic director Forrest Karr

Growing our own

A five-year, $700,000 gift from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation will help support Native students seeking doctoral degrees at UAF. The money will fund up to four competitive graduate fellowships each year for students in the dissertation-writing phase of their studies. The goal of the program is to increase the number of Native people holding doctorates and in turn increase the number of Native faculty members at colleges and universities.

“The need for programs like this is vital across the United States, where there is significant under-representation of indigenous peoples on the faculties of colleges and universities.”
— Brian Brayboy, president’s professor of education

Icy climate clues

Institute of Northern Engineering Assistant Professor Matt Nolan and an international team of researchers pulled a 150-meter-long ice core from McCall Glacier in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge this summer. “The ice core is the longest extracted from an arctic glacier in the United States,” Nolan said, “and may offer researchers their first quantitative look at up to two centuries of climate change in the region.”

Tasty tome

Historian Professor Carol Gold became a minor celebrity in Denmark after her 2007 book, Danish Cookbooks: Domesticity and National Identity, 1616 – 1901, made headlines throughout the country. Gold did several interviews in Denmark about the book, which offers insight on gender roles, literacy, identity and nationalism via three centuries of cookbooks. The book was published in both the United States and Europe and won a design award from the American Association of University Presses and a third place award from Gourmand, an international association devoted to promoting publishing on cooking, in the category “Best Culinary History.”

Cut, colored and coiffed

Early two dozen students joined the student body of the UAF Tanana Valley Campus this spring as the inaugural cosmetology pilot semester learning cohort in the campus’ licensed program. The students spent the spring basic cosmetology theory and moved on to practical training at local salons during the summer. They are expected to complete the three-semester program in December and will be eligible for state licensure upon graduation. TVC created the pilot program in response to reports from local salon owners of a serious shortage of licensed hairdressers in the greater Fairbanks area. At the time, owners reported at least 70 openings for licensed hairdressers.

By the numbers: TOTE Family Fun Fest

UA Museum of the North – June 1, 2019
◆ 1 circus tent ◆ 600 lids and parents ◆ 400 Alaska Native paper doll outfits ◆ 120 pounds of homemade casting dough ◆ 300 owl pellets ◆ 1,600 Popeye attacks ◆ 1 PBS celebrity ◆ 4 hours of family fun

Miles from where?

This summer, UAF installed a refurbished version of West Ridge’s iconic milepost sign. The sign was originally erected on West Ridge in 1973 as a symbol of UAF’s Geophysical Institute’s global reach in terms of research and collaboration. The original milepost sign was taken down in 2002 due to a major construction project. The current monument is an updated version of the original design.

KUAC captures gold

KUAC TV producers added to their gold cache in June, bringing home television’s top honors for the third consecutive year. Producers Claudia Clark and Deb Lawton and writer/editor Aaron Elterman won an Emmy Award for their KUAC TV production of “Alaska One Image Spots,” where viewers share their commitment to public television. The trio received the award at the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences Northwest chapter award ceremony held June 7 in Seattle. The station also received two other Emmy nominations. This is the fourth consecutive year the station has been nominated for Emmy Awards.

“Winning three years in a row is an honor and a tribute to the talent found at KUAC.”
— Claudia Clark, KUAC producer

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