Ice Patch Archaeology in Alaska: 2000–10

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Abstract

In the past decade, ice patch archaeological research has been initiated in several areas of Alaska, including Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, the Amphitheater Mountains, Lake Clark National Park and Preserve, Denali National Park and Preserve, Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve, Chugach National Forest, and Katmai National Park. Although still in its formative stages, this research demonstrates that high-altitude ice patches have been an important part of the annual subsistence cycles of Alaskan people for at least 4000 years. Researchers have found cultural materials at 13 Alaskan ice patches. Most artifacts recovered are related to caribou hunting; however, a growing body of evidence demonstrates that ice patches were the foci for a wide range of subsistence activities, such as hunting birds, harvesting berries, and snaring small mammals. Site interpretations are based on ethnographically documented cultural practices, animal behavior, alpine ecology and geology, and archaeological analyses.

Keywords

ice patch archaeology; alpine subsistence; climate change

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