

Use it or Lose it

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Introduction

The Yukon ice patches are revealing artifacts up to 9,000 years old. Oral history and traditional stories can help archaeologists better understand the artifacts that are being recovered.

In 2018 a ground slate point was found in a Yukon Ice Patch. Ground stone technology is a coastal phenomenon and is not typical of Yukon assemblages. The find inspired Kingeisti (David Katzeek) to share a traditional story he calls “Raven finds the Wolf People”.

Oral History

Thousands of years ago there was a great flood upon the earth and when this happened some Ɂingit people fled inland. The result was that many families were split up and left wondering if their loved ones had survived.

The story tells of a group of coastal Ɂingit people who cross the Taku Glacier in search of their relatives. After a long journey inland, they find their relatives in mourning. The people are mourning the loss of their last ground-stone adze. They did not have the knowledge, skill, or materials to make more. The coastal Tlingit people were happy to be able to gift their relatives with many new adzes.

Discussion

Traditional stories provide context to the material culture that would otherwise be unavailable. The story tells of a reconnection between the inland and coastal people.

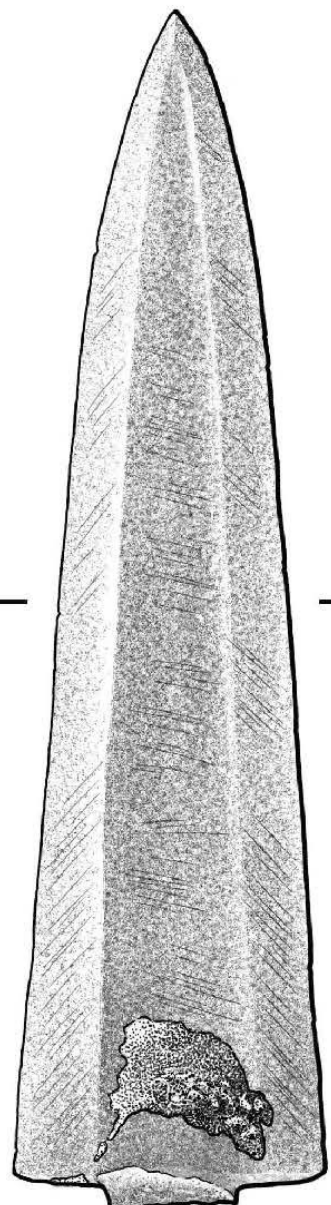
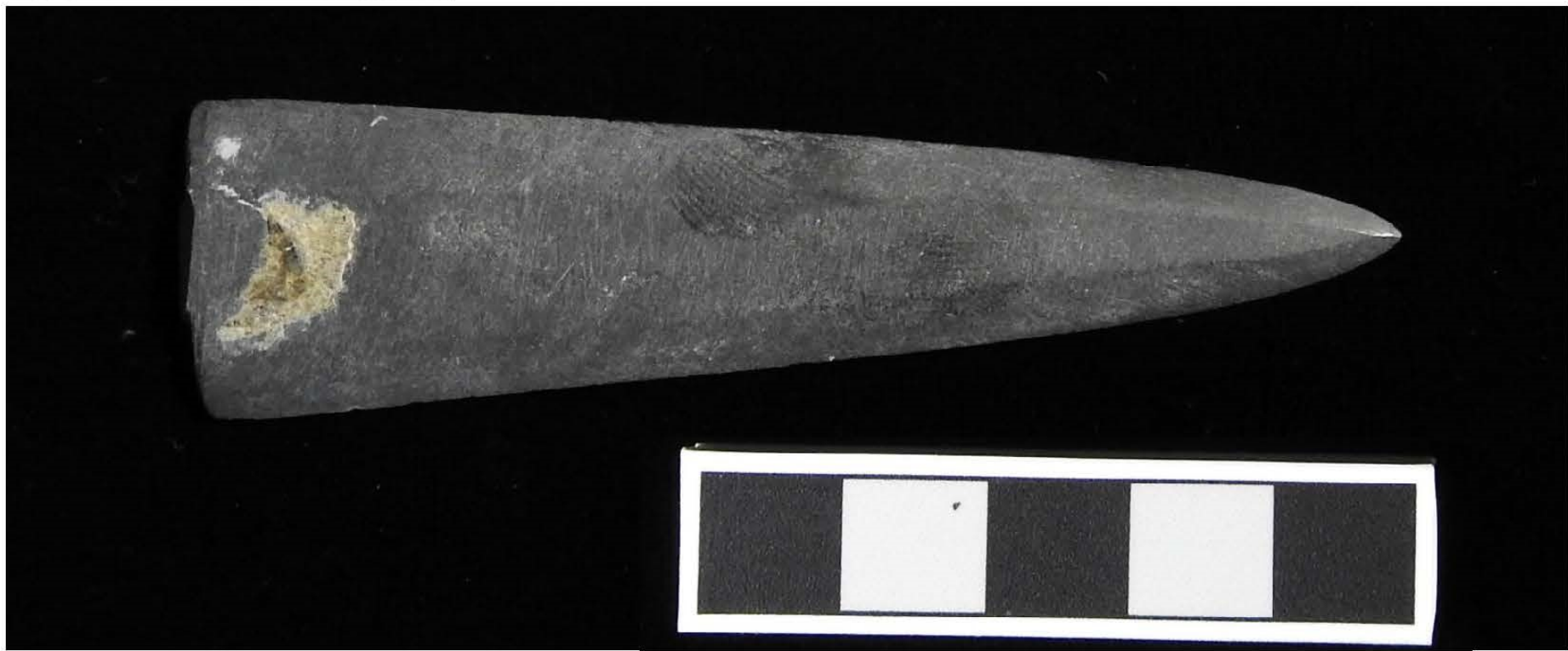
These stories provide context and meaning to the material culture. Unfortunately, we are at a point of losing the oral history that has been shared for generations. Canadian First Nations people have experienced rapid cultural change since their contact with Europeans. The result has been, in some cases, the loss of cultural traditions and oral histories. Elders are passing away and taking their knowledge with them.

This loss is coupled with the loss of the unique archaeological sites found in the ice patches as they melt away due to climate change.



Ɂingit oral history provides insight and context to archaeological findings in Yukon alpine ice patches.

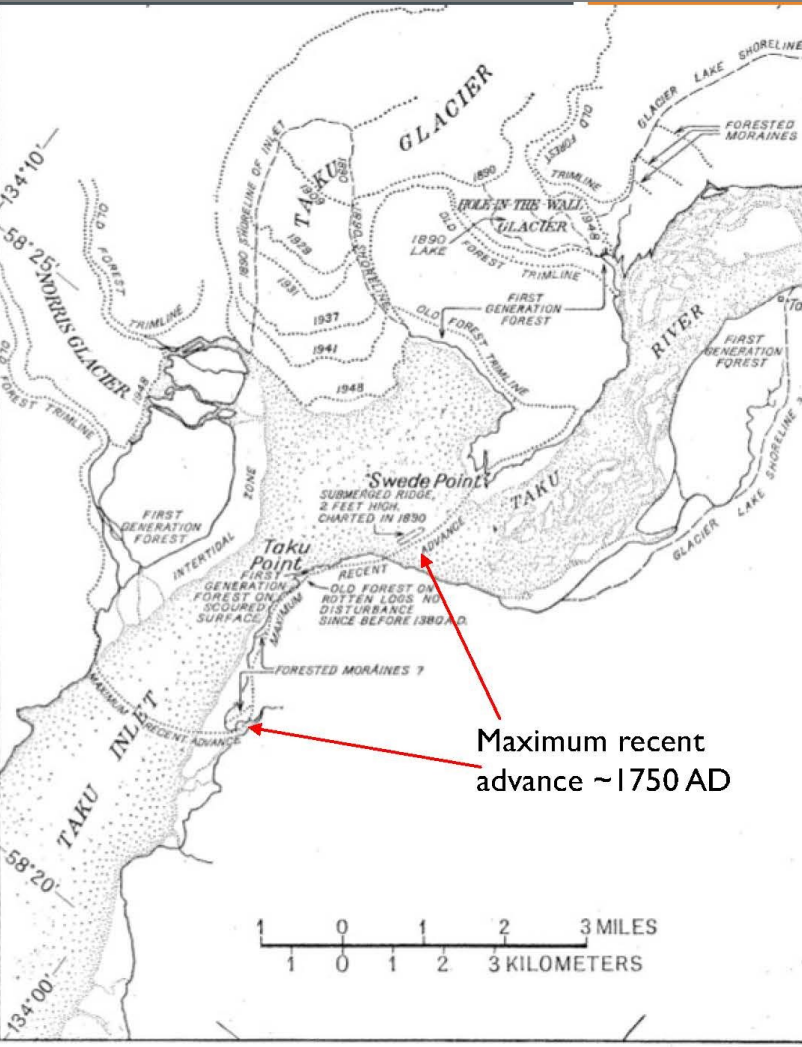
Both resources are on the brink of being lost.



MD

The Taku Glacier blocked the Taku inlet until 1750 AD

The pitch found on the ground slate point was dated to 658-550 cal years BP



The story provides valuable information related to the material cultural and potential archaeological resources in the region:

- A travel route to connect the coastal with the inland.
- At least 2 separate Ɂingit migrations inland from the coast.
- Movement across the land for reasons beyond resource gathering or trade.
- Preferred hunting areas (for seals)
- A specific area of fresh spring water associated with habitation

Effects of Climate Change

The ice patch where the slate point was recovered has experienced more than 50 m of ice front retreat since it was originally assessed 20 years ago.

A 3 m retreat was noted in just a 3 week period in 2018, and visits in the 2019 season record a retreat of a further 10 m.

