

A Selection from

Smithsonian at the Poles

Contributions to
International Polar Year Science

*Igor Krupnik, Michael A. Lang,
and Scott E. Miller
Editors*

A Smithsonian Contribution to Knowledge



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“Of No Ordinary Importance”: Reversing Polarities in Smithsonian Arctic Studies

William W. Fitzhugh

ABSTRACT. The founding of the Smithsonian in 1846 offered the promise of scientific discovery and popular education to a young country with a rapidly expanding western horizon. With its natural history and native cultures virtually unknown, Smithsonian Regents chartered a plan to investigate the most exciting questions posed by an unexplored continent at the dawn of the Darwinian era. Prominent issues included the origins and history of its aboriginal peoples, and this thirst for knowledge that led the young institution into America’s subarctic and Arctic regions. The Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Alaska were among the first targets of Smithsonian cultural studies, and northern regions have continued to occupy a central place in the Institution’s work for more than 150 years. Beginning with Robert Kennicott’s explorations in 1858, Smithsonian scientists played a major role in advancing knowledge of North American Arctic and Subarctic peoples and interpreting their cultures. Several of these early enterprises, like the explorations, collecting, and research of Edward Nelson, Lucien Turner, John Murdoch, and Patrick Ray in Alaska and Lucien Turner in Ungava, either led to or were part of the first International Polar Year of 1882–1883. Early Smithsonian expeditions established a pattern of collaborative work with native communities that became a hallmark of the institution’s northern programs. This paper presents highlights of 150 years of Smithsonian work on northern peoples with special attention to themes that contributed to Smithsonian Arctic studies during International Polar/Geophysical Year events, especially 1882–1883 and 2007–2008.

HISTORICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The International Polar Year (IPY) 2007–2008 provides an opportunity to explore how the Smithsonian has served for the past 150 years as a repository of Arctic knowledge and a center for northern research and education. When Robert Kennicott arrived in the Mackenzie District in 1859 to make natural history and ethnology collections for the Smithsonian, science in the North American Arctic was in its infancy. By the time the first IPY began in 1882, the Smithsonian had investigated parts of the Canadian Arctic and Subarctic and the Mackenzie District. Further, it had sent naturalists to the Northwest Coast, the Aleutians, western Alaska, and nearby Chukotka in Siberia and was on its way toward developing the largest well-documented Arctic anthropological and natural history collection in the world. By its close in 1883–1884 major

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IPY-related field programs in Barrow, Ellesmere Island, and Ungava had been or were nearly completed and collecting projects in Kodiak and Bristol Bay were underway. The cumulative results established the Smithsonian as the pre-eminent scholarly institution of its day in the fields of northern natural and anthropological science.

In the 125 years since IPY-1, northern collecting, research, publication, and education programs have given the Smithsonian an Arctic heritage of immense value to scholars, Natives and northern residents, and interested public around the world. It is a world, moreover, in which Arctic issues have steadily moved from the exoticized periphery of global attention to a well-publicized central focus, as a result of changes in geopolitics, climate, and governance. We are hearing about the north now more than ever before, and this trend is accelerating as global warming strikes deeper into polar regions, transforming oceans, lands, and lives.

Elsewhere I explored how nineteenth-century Smithsonian Arctic scientists laid the foundation for the field of museum anthropology (Fitzhugh, 1988a; 2002a) and public presentation and exhibition of Arctic cultures at the Institution during the past 125 years (Fitzhugh, 1997). Here I review some of the themes that contributed to Smithsonian Arctic studies during International Polar/Geophysical Year events, especially 1882–1883 and 2007–2008. My purpose is not only to illustrate how long-term Smithsonian research, collecting, and exhibition has contributed to Arctic social and natural science, but also to explore how these historical assets contribute to understanding a region undergoing rapid, dynamic social and environmental change.

FOUNDATIONS OF ARCTIC SCIENCE

Heather Ewing's recent book, *The Lost World of James Smithson* (Ewing, 2007), reveals the Smithsonian's reclusive founder as more intellectual and politically active than previously thought but provides few clues as to what his bequest mandate intended. Accordingly, setting the course for the young Smithsonian fell to its first Secretary, Joseph Henry (1797–1878), and his scientific assistant, Spencer Baird (1823–1887), who followed Henry as Secretary and presided during the years of IPY-1. Both Henry and Baird shared in establishing natural science and cultural studies at the Smithsonian and gave early priority to northern studies, which Henry judged “of no ordinary importance” (Smithsonian Institution Annual Report [SIAR], 1860:66). In fact, during the Smithsonian's earli-

est years, it is surprising how much energy went into research and publication on Arctic subjects, including Elisha Kent Kane's meteorological, tidal, and magnetic studies; McClintock's and Kane's searches for Franklin; and solar observations and natural history collecting in Labrador and Hudson Bay during the 1850s.

Drawing on his previous experience as a regent of the New York University and his association with ethnologists Henry Schoolcraft and Lewis Henry Morgan, Henry was instrumental in laying groundwork for what was to become the field of museum anthropology at the Smithsonian (Fitzhugh, 2002a). In fact, Henry believed that cultural studies would eventually develop into a discipline as rigorous as the natural sciences, and for this reason instructed Baird to include ethnology among the tasks of naturalists he hired as field observers and collectors. Baird believed taxonomic and distributional studies of animals and plants in northwestern North America would reveal relationships with Asia and lead to understanding their origins and development, and he came to believe that “ethnological” collections could also reveal deep history.

In 1859, a gifted young protégée of Baird's named Robert Kennicott (1835–1866) became the first of “Baird's missionaries” (Rivinus and Youssef, 1992:83; Fitzhugh, 2002a) sent north to begin this grand task (Lindsay, 1993). Kennicott spent 1859 to 1862 in the Hudson Bay Territory and Mackenzie District making the first carefully documented natural history collections from any North American Arctic region. Assisted by Natives and Hudson Bay Company agents, he also collected more than 500 ethnological specimens from Inuvialuit (Mackenzie Eskimo) and Dene Indians, as well as linguistic data, myths and oral history, and ethnological observations. In his report to the Regents on 1861, Henry noted the collections being submitted by the factors of the Hudson's Bay Company, “taken into connexion with what Mr. Kennicott is doing, bid fair to make the Arctic natural history and physical geography of America as well known as that of the United States” (SIAR, 1862:60). A year later Henry reported (SIAR, 1863:39), “This enterprise has terminated very favorably, the explorer having returned richly laden with specimens, after making a series of observations on the physical geography, ethnology, and the habits of animals of the regions visited, which cannot fail to furnish materials of much interest to science.”

In 1860, when Kennicott first began to explore west from the Mackenzie into Russian America territory, only southern and western Alaska had been previously explored ethnologically by Russians, and northern and eastern Alaska was nearly unknown (Sherwood, 1965; James,

1942). Ethnological collecting had been conducted sporadically in coastal and southwest Alaska since ca. 1800 by Russia and its agents [e.g., Lavrentii Zagoskin (1842–1844)]. In 1839–1849, purposive but not scientifically directed ethnological museum collecting was carried out by Ilya G. Voznesenskii for the Russian Academy of Sciences (Black, 1988; Fitzhugh, 1988a; Kuzmina, 1994; Fitzhugh and Chaussonnet, 1994).

In 1865, the Western Union Telegraph Company was pushing an overland telegraph line to Europe via the Yukon River, Bering Strait, and Siberia. That year Baird asked Kennicott to direct the scientific activity of the survey with assistance from William Healy Dall, Henry W. Elliott, and several other naturalists (Figure 1; Collins, 1946; Fitzhugh and Selig, 1981). While making the first scientifically documented American collections from interior and coastal Alaska north of the Aleutians, the project collapsed after Kennicott’s death on the Yukon River in May 1866, and the subsequent completion of a transatlantic cable by a

rival company the following July. Nevertheless, the Western Union survey produced the first scientifically documented American collections from Alaska, trained the first American scholars of Alaska, and led to the first English-language books on “the great land” written by Henry W. Elliott (1886), Frederick Whympers (1869), and William Healy Dall (1870).

In the early 1870s, Baird and Dall began to implement a more ambitious Alaskan collecting venture. Realizing the Smithsonian could not finance a sustained endeavor by itself, Baird recruited government agencies like the U.S. Army Signal Service, Hydrographic Office, and War Department to employ Smithsonian naturalists as weather and tidal observers at government stations throughout the newly purchased territory. Their activities produced a vast collection of meteorological, geographical, natural historical, and anthropological data that, supplemented by photography after 1880 (Fitzhugh, 1998c), laid the scientific bedrock for later studies in Alaska and northern Quebec.



FIGURE 1. Frederick Whympers’s illustration of the Western Union Telegraph Survey team battling ice on the Yukon River below Nulato in Eskimo *umiaks* in spring 1866. (From Whympers, 1869)

While Baird's collecting and publication programs were an unqualified success, only part of Baird's and Henry's original plan was ever realized. Documentation of endangered cultures and languages fulfilled their science plan and provided materials for further study, following Henry's expectation that new methods and techniques would lead to creating a "hard" science of anthropology. This prospective view from the mid-nineteenth century is still our optimistic view at the turn of the twenty-first century but it probably will never be realized. Progress in anthropological science has come in different directions: Ethnology and cultural anthropology have not merged with the natural or hard sciences as Baird and Henry predicted. Rather, Smithsonian anthropology proceeded to develop in other directions: the study of human remains and forensics; archaeology (long one of Henry's interests but one that was impossible to conduct with the method and theory available in the late nineteenth century); and another set of anthropological fields not imagined by them at all—heritage, ethnicity, and cultural identity.

SMITHSONIAN ACTIVITIES IN IPY-1 (1881–1884)

As the first IPY approached, the Smithsonian had conducted work throughout most regions of Alaska south of the Bering Strait: James G. Swan had collected on the Northwest Coast in the 1850–1880s; Robert Kennicott in British America in 1859–1862 and in interior Alaska, 1865–1866; William Healy Dall in western Alaska and the Aleutians, 1865–1885; Lucien Turner in St. Michael, 1871–1877, and the Aleutians, 1877–1878; and Edward W. Nelson had just completed studies in the Yukon, Kuskokwim, and Bering Strait in 1877–1881 (Figure 2). Several other collecting projects were proceeding in southern Alaska, but none had been carried out north of Bering Strait.

The 1881 voyage of the Revenue Cutter *Corwin* briefly visited the coast between the Bering Strait and Barrow with a scientific team including Edward W. Nelson, John Muir, and Irving Rosse, reaching as far east as the Inuit settlement of Ooglamie at today's Barrow, and as far west as Herald and Wrangel Islands in the Chukchi Sea and Wankarem on the Arctic coast of Siberia. The visit to Barrow was only two days, and Nelson's diary notes that he had difficulty making collections and gathering information. Barrow people had been dealing with European whalers for almost three decades and knew how to drive hard bargains.

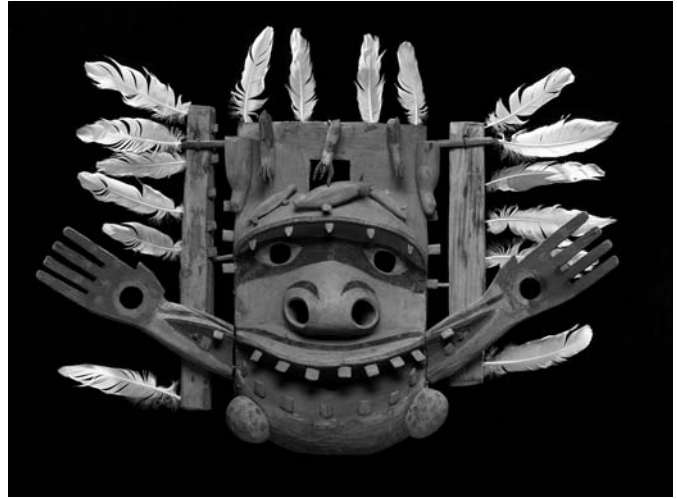


FIGURE 2. Ceremonial mask representing Tunghak, Spirit of the Game, collected by Edward W. Nelson from the Lower Yukon River, undergoing conservation in 2003. (NMNH 33118)

As documented in accompanying papers in this volume, the Smithsonian's major collection focus in IPY-1 were Barrow and Ungava Bay. Given the Institution's interest in Alaska, Barrow became the primary target of a major effort directed by Lt. Patrick Henry Ray with the assistance of John Murdoch, a Smithsonian employee who carried out ethnological studies (Ray, 1885; Murdoch, 1892; Burch, 2009, this volume; Crowell, 2009, this volume). The Barrow project filled the last major gap in the Smithsonian's survey coverage of Alaska and, second only to Nelson's work, made the most important contribution to science. Living for two full years in a weather station near the native village, Murdoch concentrated his efforts on ethnological collecting and reporting. Like Nelson, he collected vocabularies and linguistic data, but he did not venture out on long trips with Native guides or show much interest in oral history and mythology (Burch, 2009, this volume; A. Crowell, Arctic Studies Center, personal communication, 2007). Murdoch's more remote approach led him to be duped by Natives who sold him artifacts they constructed hastily for sale or had composited from unmatched materials, inserting stone scrapers in ivory handles that had no blades or embellishing ancient ivory objects with new designs.

Nevertheless, while Murdoch was not as perceptive a cultural observer, his work received great notice in the developing profession of anthropology. Boas' *The Central Eskimo* (1888a), also published by the Smithsonian, made Murdoch's *Ethnological Results of the Point Barrow Expedition* (1892) the first study of a Western Arctic Eskimo

group. More importantly, Murdoch’s monograph directly addressed the scholarly debates about Eskimo origins and migrations and utilized a scientific method, making specific comparisons of Alaskan Eskimo customs and material objects with those known from the Canadian Arctic and Greenland. When Nelson’s (1899) monograph, *The Eskimos About Bering Strait*, appeared several years later, it was not fully appreciated by anthropologists because Nelson was a biologist and his highly descriptive study did not address the Eskimo origin controversy (Fitzhugh, 1988b). As a result, until the 1980s most scholars did not comprehend the importance of differences between Yup’ik and Iñupiat material culture, art, and language that these monographs clearly illustrated. Even Boas, who made much of cultural continuities in Raven mythology, art, and folklore between Northwest Coast and Northeast Asia (Boas, 1903, 1905, 1933; Bogoras, 1902), failed to recognize that these features were also present in the geographically intermediate Yup’ik Bering Sea and Iñupiat Eskimo area; he continued throughout his life to promote the idea that Eskimos were recent arrivals to the Bering Strait from Canada (Boas, 1888b, 1905; see below). It was not until much later that Yup’ik Eskimo culture began to be understood as a distinct Eskimo tradition with stronger ties to the south than to Iñupiat and other Arctic coast Eskimo cultures, and with a legacy from ancient Eskimo cultures of the Bering Sea (Fitzhugh, 1988c; Dumond, 2003).

Other projects also made important contributions to the Smithsonian’s IPY-1 program even though they were not part of the official IPY agenda. Charles MacKay’s collections from the Signal Service Station at Nushagak in Bristol Bay (1881–1883) contained fascinating materials from the border between Yup’ik, Aleut, and Alutiiq cultures, complementing S. Applegate’s materials from Unalaska and nearby regions (1881–1885). However, none of these collections was ever published or exhibited, and the early ethnography of this boundary region is still poorly known today. More prominent is the work of William J. Fisher who contributed materials from southern Alaska and Kodiak Island throughout the 1880s (Crowell, 1992). Like Applegate and MacKay, Fisher did not prepare reports; however, his collection became the subject of intensive recent study and exhibition (Crowell et al., 2001). Two other projects also were “official” Smithsonian IPY ventures (Krupnik, 2009, this volume). Adolphus Greely’s ill-fated scientific explorations at Fort Conger, Lady Franklin Bay, Ellesmere Island in High Arctic Canada, were a massive undertaking organized by the U.S. Signal Service in 1882–1883 (Barr, 1985), for which Spencer Baird served as scientific advisor. Although the expedition

ended in disaster, it obtained important scientific observations. Many of the weather, aurora, and meteorological observations were archived at the Smithsonian, which also received a few natural history and ethnological specimens, along with the team’s scientific instruments. Today the Barrow and Fort Conger weather records serve as important benchmarks for long-term study of climate change (Wood and Overland, 2006). The third official Smithsonian IPY-1 field study, Lucien Turner’s ethnological work among the Innu and Inuit of Ungava Bay in northern Quebec during 1882–1884, produced a trove of important ethnological materials from both Innu (Naskapi) and Inuit (Eastern Eskimo) groups, as well as natural history and photographic records (Turner 1894; Loring, 2001a, 2009, this volume).

BUILDING ON IPY-1: MUSEUM EXHIBITION, RESEARCH, AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL THEORY

By 1890, the great era of synoptic Smithsonian natural history-based collecting had passed and attention began to be devoted to publishing, collection work, building a specialized scientific staff, and presenting American cultures to the world. Following the 1893 Chicago Columbian Exposition, a series of world’s fairs exhibited living Eskimos and other northern peoples together with displays of museum collections to wide audiences in Chicago, New Orleans, St. Louis, Buffalo, and other locations. The Smithsonian’s Arctic ethnography collections were featured in many of these exhibitions, and some of the displays were later installed in the Smithsonian’s permanent galleries. This was the era of the dramatic life-group diorama reconstructions pioneered by the Smithsonian’s famous artist-geologist William Henry Holmes. His Polar Eskimo group for the Buffalo fair in 1901 became one of the most popular exhibits after the National Museum of Natural History opened in 1910 and remained on view for nearly 100 years (Figure 3; Ewers, 1959:513–525; Fitzhugh, 1997).

Concurrent with growth of exhibitions and new architecture on the Washington Mall, the Smithsonian began to build its curatorial staff and hire its first professionally trained anthropologists. The Bureau of American Ethnology founded by John Wesley Powell in 1879 as a center for anthropological field surveys, research, and publication (Hinsley, 1981) was the first Smithsonian entity staffed by anthropologists. In 1891, Powell’s linguistic surveys and subsequent synthesis produced the first linguistic map of North America, a tour de force of early museum research that seemed to establish language as the guiding structure



FIGURE 3. The Polar Eskimo of Smith Sound, Greenland, display—created by William Henry Holmes for the Buffalo Exposition in 1901 and on exhibit since then at the National Museum of Natural History—was dismantled in October 2004. Robert Peary Jr. of Qaanak (at right), the Inuit grandson of the American explorer who collected some of the materials for this exhibit, was present for the event. (Courtesy Department of Anthropology, Smithsonian Institution)

for cultural diversity. However, by 1893, Otis Mason's study of material culture collections across North America showed both congruence and discontinuity across linguistic boundaries (Figure 4). Eskimo collections figured prominently in his work, demonstrating gradual stylistic changes in dress, implements, kayaks, and other equipment (Mason, 1891, 1896, 1902; Ewers, 1959:513–525)—except in Greenland, where 200 years of exposure to European culture had produced a radical departure from traditional Central and Western Eskimo clothing and design. Mason concluded that tribal material culture and language groups were not always synchronous, as Powell had supposed, but more closely followed C. Hart Merriam's biogeographic life zones. But even here discontinuities resulted from external influence, migration, language capture and loss, and other cultural and historical factors. Mason's "culture area" con-

cept was a direct outgrowth of museum-based research on the Smithsonian's Arctic IPY-1 collections and remains one of the underpinnings of anthropological theory today. As analysis of the Smithsonian's pan-North American Arctic collections progressed, it seemed that anthropology was drifting further from the pure science Henry predicted it would become.

NEW SCIENCE ARRIVES: PHYSICAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND ARCHAEOLOGY

These gropings toward the development of anthropological science did not become fully professionalized until Aleš Hrdlička (1869–1943), the father of American physical anthropology, joined the Smithsonian in 1903 and be-



FIGURE 4. This spear thrower display was assembled by Otis Mason to demonstrate spatial changes in artifact types across culture and space, analogous to biological species distribution. North American Eskimo throwers (bottom row) are arranged from Alaska (left) to Greenland and Labrador (right). These and many other Eskimo artifacts demonstrate systematic style change from west to east. (Courtesy Department of Anthropology, Smithsonian Institution)

gan to study the question of Indian and Eskimo origins with new methods and discipline applied to human skeletal remains. Hrdlička’s Alaskan work utilized methods of field collecting offended native people, and are seen today as outrageously insensitive, and his scientific results, while interesting in their day, have been largely superseded (Scott, 1994). Perhaps his most lasting contribution was recruitment of T. Dale Stewart and Henry B. Collins to the Smithsonian staff in the mid 1920s. Stewart refined Hrdlička’s osteological methods and inherited Hrdlička’s mantle while Collins took a different path, bringing archaeology into the forefront of studies of Eskimo origins through his pioneering stratigraphic excavations on St. Lawrence Island in the 1930s (Collins, 1937, 1951). Here an unbroken sequence of changing artifact forms, art styles, house types, and economies demonstrated a

long history of local development interrupted periodically by Asian influences over the past 2,000 years. Hrdlička’s, Stewart’s, and Collins’ early work in Alaska was conducted largely without reference to the Smithsonian’s early IPY collections and research products and without reference to IPY-2 and IGY 1957–1958 program efforts, with which Smithsonian scientists had little involvement (Krupnik, 2009, this volume).

PUBLIC “DISCOVERY” OF ESKIMO ART

In 1973, the Institution’s IPY-1 ethnological collections from Barrow and Collin’s prehistoric archaeological materials from Bering Strait resurfaced suddenly and dramatically with the refined cachet of “Eskimo art” when

the National Gallery of Art opened its groundbreaking exhibition *The Far North: 2000 Years of American Indian and Eskimo Art* (Collins, 1973). C. D. Lewis, curator of sculpture at the Gallery, was assigned to curate the exhibition, and I assisted his search for northern art among the Smithsonian's Arctic collections. The experience was life-changing. Acquaintance with the collections, coupled with the phenomenal success of the exhibit, convinced me that the Smithsonian "attic" housed treasures of interest not only to anthropologists and Native constituencies but also to a far broader audience. To paraphrase former Smithsonian Secretary S. Dillon Ripley's reference to the Institution's musical instrument collections, we needed to take the Arctic treasures out of their storage cabinets and make them "sing."

In the late 1970s, I began to do that, and with William C. Sturtevant started meeting with anthropologists from

the Soviet Academy of Science's Institute of Ethnography to plan an exhibit on the cultures of Siberia and Alaska. Political difficulties caused periodic delays, and it did not open until 1988, in the early phase of the Gorbachev revolution known as *perestroika* (Fitzhugh, 2003). During the years while *Crossroads* was gestating, Susan Kaplan and I created an exhibit based on the ethnological collections made by Edward W. Nelson in 1877–1881 from western Alaska and Bering Strait. *Inua: Spirit World of the Bering Sea Eskimo* (Fitzhugh and Kaplan, 1983) explored the art, culture, and history of the Yup'ik peoples of southwest Alaska. The exhibit (Figure 5) and catalog illustrated the extraordinary beauty and workmanship of Yup'ik and Bering Strait Iñupiat culture. After opening at the Smithsonian in 1982, *Inua* toured to Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau, and other cities in North America. Later, Kaplan and I created a mini-*Inua* version that toured to



FIGURE 5. E. W. Nelson collections from 1877–1881 in a hunting ritual display in *Inua: Spirit World of the Bering Sea Eskimo*. (1983 photograph; courtesy Arctic Studies Center, Smithsonian Institution)

small museums and culture centers in Alaska, Canada, and Greenland (Fitzhugh and Kaplan, 1983). Eventually a third version, “Euro-*Inua*” (Figure 6), was developed by Susan Rowley for a tour across eastern and northern Europe and Iceland (Rowley, 1988).

After the long hiatus following Collins’ work in the 1930s, these 1980s exhibits and publications brought Smithsonian Alaska collections to a wide audience in North America and to the rest of the world, especially to Alaska residents and native villages. They also brought us to the attention of Ted Stevens, U.S. Senator from Alaska. Early in 1980 while I was preparing *Inua*, I had occasion to give his wife, Ann Stevens, a tour of the Smithsonian’s Alaskan collections in what was then a very dusty Natural History Museum attic. A few days later, the Senator called for his own tour, during which he remarked, “Bill, we have to find a way to get these collections back to Alaska.” The IPY-1 and other early Alaskan collections indeed had a captivating power, and it was growing year by year. That tour and the senator’s remark gave me my marching orders for the next twenty-five years and in time led to a dedicated Smithsonian program reconnecting its historic collections with Alaska and its Native peoples.

As I explored the Smithsonian attic, I was amazed to discover how little the collections were known. In those days the Smithsonian’s attic was a virtual King Tut’s tomb before excavation—quiet, dusty, and full of splendid things! The Smithsonian had never hired an Arctic ethnol-

ogist, and Hrdlička, Collins, and Stewart had not strayed far from their osteological and archaeological disciplines. The few scholars aware of the collections knew them only from small black and white illustrations in Nelson’s and Murdoch’s monographs. Ronald Senungetuk, an artist on the staff of the University of Alaska in Fairbanks who came to Washington in 1981 to consult on the *Inua* exhibit, may have been the first Alaska Native to inspect them firsthand.

During the late 1980s, we completed arrangements to launch *Crossroads of Continents: Cultures of Siberia and Alaska* (Fitzhugh and Crowell, 1988). The exhibit (Figure 7) was based on a reciprocal exchange that paralleled the history of the collections: The earliest objects from Alaska had been gathered during the Russian–America era and had been stored at the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography in Leningrad since the 1840s, whereas the earliest Siberian materials had been gathered by Franz Boas’ Jesup North Pacific Expedition and were held by the American Museum of Natural History in New York.



FIGURE 6. Catalogs issued for the mini-*Inua* exhibitions that toured small museums in Alaska in 1983–1984 (Fitzhugh and Kaplan, 1983) and in Europe 1988–1989 (Rowley, 1988). (2008 photograph; courtesy Arctic Studies Center, Smithsonian Institution)

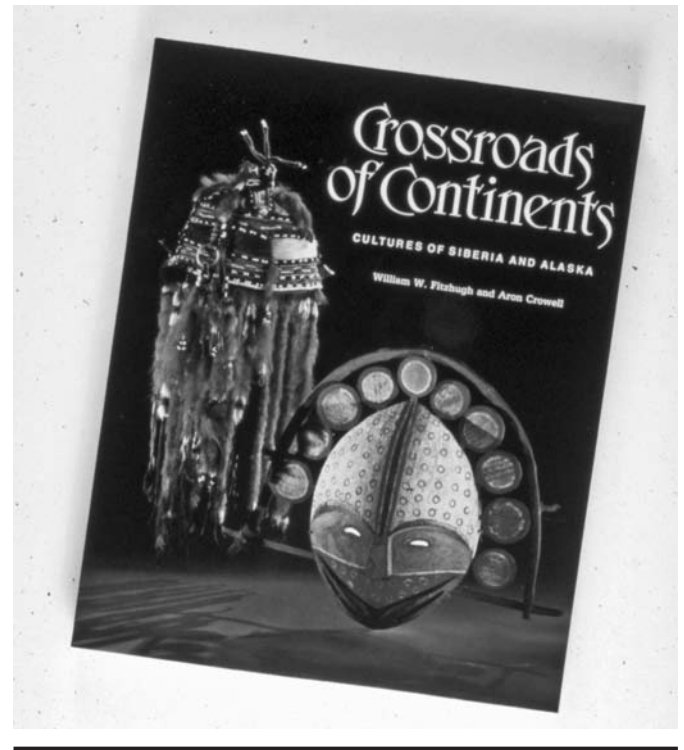


FIGURE 7. *Crossroads of Continents* combined Russian collections from Alaska with American collections from Siberia in an integrated exhibition featuring the history, culture, and art of the peoples of the North Pacific rim. (1988 photograph; courtesy Arctic Studies Center, Smithsonian Institution)

Logistics, geography, political barriers, and lack of publication and scholarly exchange, to say nothing of native awareness, had made it impossible to synthesize a larger view of the traditional cultures of the North Pacific ‘crossroads’ region. Every one of the 650 specimens was jointly selected and researched by teams from both sides during yearly visits financed by the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX). Co-curated with Aron Crowell and assisted by Valérie Chaussonnet, Sergei Arutiunov, Sergei Serov, Bill Holm, James VanStone, and many others, including Igor Krupnik, this exhibit put us in direct contact with Soviet scholars and laid the groundwork for future research, publication, conferences, and exhibit ventures. The show toured in Alaska and the lower 48 and was the first joint U.S.–Soviet exhibition in which American and Soviet/Russian materials were published in a single catalog and comingled in a single display (Fitzhugh, 2003).

In the early 1990s, following precedent established by the mini-*Inua* exhibits, Valérie Chaussonnet organized a small version of *Crossroads* called *Crossroads Alaska* that toured towns across Alaska (Chaussonnet, 1995; Carlo et al., 1995). Unfortunately, when it came time to transfer the large *Crossroads* exhibit to Russia, economic and security conditions had deteriorated so much that the tour was cancelled. Nevertheless, as a substitute, in 1996 we arranged for a smaller exhibit *Crossroads Siberia* (Krupnik, 1996) to tour cities in the Russian Far East, curated by Igor Krupnik, who had come to work at the Arctic Studies Center in 1991. This was probably the first anthropology exhibit to travel in Siberia, as well as the first Alaska Native artifacts to be seen in the Russian Far East.

A WIDENING FOCUS: ARCTIC STUDIES CENTER AND CIRCUMPOLAR ANTHROPOLOGY

In 1988, the Smithsonian received congressional support for creating a special unit called the Arctic Studies Center (ASC) in the National Museum of Natural History, enabling a series of new research, education, and publication ventures that have been described in annual ASC newsletters and on the website (www.mnh.si.edu/arctic). Building anew on the IPY-1 legacy and new *Crossroads* partnerships, in 1992 a 10-year archival research and publication project titled “Jesup II” was initiated with United States, Russian, Japanese, and Canadian partners (Krupnik and Fitzhugh, 2001; Kendall and Krupnik, 2003). To fulfill Boas’ original vision of the scope of the Jesup expedi-

tion (Boas, 1903)—a vision thwarted by bureaucracy and logistics during the expedition and by Soviet fiat excluding the Ainu from the *Crossroads* exhibition—with Japanese and Ainu scholars, we produced a comprehensive Ainu exhibition and catalog drawing on collections and archives in museums in North America and Japan (Fitzhugh and Dubreuil, 1999).

Concurrent with the opening of field opportunities in Russia after 1990, the ASC began a re-study of culture themes that motivated circumpolar theories of Arctic peoples in the early twentieth century (Gjessing, 1944; Bogoras, 1902, 1929; Fitzhugh, 1975; Dumond, 2003) with new fieldwork in the lower Ob River and Yamal Peninsula. Supported by a grant from Amoco Eurasia Corporation, we conducted archaeological surveys and ethno-archaeology of Nenets reindeer-herders in Western Siberia (Fedorova et al., 1998; Fitzhugh, 1998a; 1998b; Fitzhugh and Golovnev, 1998; Haakanson, 2000; Fedorova, 2005) combined with several museum-focused heritage projects, exhibits, and catalogs (Krupnik and Narinskaya, 1998; Krupnik, 1998; Pika, 1998). Subsequently, with Andrei Golovnev and Vladimir Pitul’ko, we searched for pre-Eskimo sites eastward from Yamal along the Arctic coast to Bering Strait, inspired by Leonid Khlobystin’s pioneering work (Khlobystin, 2005) and assisted excavations at an 8,000-year-old Mesolithic site on Zhokhov Island (Pitul’ko, 2001). Although the results did not reveal evidence of proto-Eskimo culture, they helped explain why earlier researchers believed Eskimo adaptations and art had originated in these regions (Larsen and Rainey, 1948; Fitzhugh, 1998a) and helped fill a large gap in circumpolar archaeology (Fitzhugh, 2002b). Later our research and public programs gap in the North Atlantic was filled by production of a major exhibition titled *Vikings: the North Atlantic Saga*, which opened in 2000 and toured to various locations in North America (Fitzhugh and Ward, 2000).

REVITALIZING THE SMITHSONIAN- ALASKA CONNECTION

Beginning in the early 1990s, the reprinting of Nelson’s and Murdoch’s monographs and new interest created by the Alaska tours of *Inua* and *Crossroads* and their mini-exhibit versions resulted in a major revitalization of the Smithsonian–Alaska connection. Unlike the earlier focus on collecting and research, these efforts were based on collection interpretation, education, and public access. Whereas earlier work involved primarily a one-way trans-

fer of Alaskan objects and information to Smithsonian coffers for use in research, publication, and exhibitions, the emerging emphasis used the Smithsonian treasures to engage Native groups and individuals in two-way collaborative studies and publication, along with joint curation of exhibitions, museum training, and re-documentation of the Smithsonian’s early object and archival collections (Fienup-Riordan, 1996, 2007; Loring, 1996).

The overwhelming interest exhibited by Alaskans to early Smithsonian collections helped spark a revival of interest in traditional native culture, and in the early 1990s we began to explore the idea of opening a regional office to formalize a new permanent Smithsonian–Alaska connection. In April 1994, we opened an office at the Anchorage Museum of History and Art and shortly after, Aron Crowell joined the ASC as local director and launched archaeological research, museum training, exhibition, and teaching projects.

As the Alaska office took shape, back in Washington the ASC staff collaborated on collection projects with the National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) Repatriation Office, which was working with Alaska Native groups on the return of human remains collected by Hrdlička, Stewart, Collins, and others in the early 1920–1930s. More than 3,500 skeletal remains were transferred back to Native groups between 1990–2007, together with associated grave goods and religious objects (Bray and Killion, 1994; <http://anthropology.si.edu/repatriation>). ASC staff began to work with Native groups to document old archival and ethnographic collections from Alaska, and by 2001 these “knowledge repatriation” projects (Crowell et al., 2001; Loring, 2001b, 2008; Krupnik, 2004, 2005) blossomed into the Alaska Collection Project, bringing Alaska Natives into contact with Smithsonian collections for intensive study and re-documentation, with the ultimate aim of loaning them back to Alaska for study and exhibition.

In 1994 Crowell began an exhibition project with the William J. Fisher Alutiiq ethnographic collection from the Kodiak Island area gathered in 1880–1885 during the first IPY era, but never previously published or exhibited. The resulting exhibit—*Looking Both Ways: Heritage and Identity of the Alutiiq People*—and its catalog and website, co-curated by Crowell with Alutiiq leaders and organized with the Alutiiq Museum (Crowell et al., 2001; Pullar, 2001), helped catalyze the movement by Alutiiq peoples to rejuvenate Kodiak cultural traditions in art, oral history, language, and material culture (Crowell, 2004; Clifford, 2004).

The collections and observations garnered as well as the re-publication (with new data) of the Nelson, Murdoch, and Turner monographs, and presentation of exhibitions and new illustrated catalogs have proven important both for science and historical legacies. For instance, without historical baseline information from archaeological sites, it is impossible to determine the significance of climate shifts or assess the effects of long-term cultural and environmental change. Further, preservation of traditional artifacts, customs, and oral histories and presentation of these materials through exhibitions and other venues have given Alaska Natives a window into a past that had been largely forgotten or was considered irrelevant to the modern day (Kaplan and Barsness, 1986; Fitzhugh, 1988c; Chaussonnet, 1995).

Now nearing its fifteenth year, the Smithsonian relationship with the Anchorage Museum is poised to take another giant step forward. With funding from the Ras-muson Foundation and others, the Anchorage Museum has constructed a new wing to house an expanded ASC office and research suite. A major part of this wing will be a Smithsonian exhibition hall displaying nearly 650 anthropological objects loaned from the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History and the National Museum of the American Indian (Figure 8). The collections have

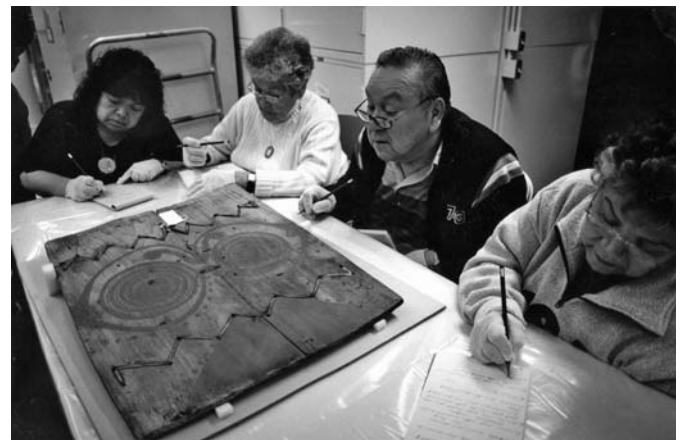


FIGURE 8. Unangan consultants (from left) Daria Dirks, Marie Turnpaugh, Vlaas Shabolin, and Mary Bourdukofsky study a painted wooden shield from Kagamil in the Aleutian Islands, Alaska (ASCN11:3). Native experts—young and old—have helped to re-document the objects with new information, stories, songs, and native language, and the process has helped to find new routes to the past. (2003 photograph; courtesy Arctic Studies Center, Smithsonian Institution)



FIGURE 9. The Ralph Applebaum Associates rendition of the Native Cultures exhibition to open in 2010 in the Smithsonian Gallery of the expanded Anchorage Museum.

been selected by teams of exhibit designers, conservators, and Alaska Native experts under the curatorial direction of Aron Crowell and will open in 2010 (Figure 9). A pilot exhibit titled *Sharing Knowledge* and a website of the same name have been created (Figure 10; <http://alaska.si.edu>) and expanded educational programs are planned as part of a new phase of the Smithsonian's commitment to Alaska and its cultures and peoples.

INTO THIN AIR: ARCTIC STUDIES AND IPY 2007–2008

The convergence of the Smithsonian's effort to forge a new relationship with Native and other constituencies in Alaska and across the circumpolar north featured in many current International Polar Year projects is hardly a coincidence. Just as the Smithsonian's work with northern peoples has evolved over the past fifteen years, so too have biologists, oceanographers, and other natural scientists begun to recognize the need for active involvement of northern residents in the enterprise of polar science. For the first time since IPY-1, the 2007–2008 IPY includes social science as a major research focus as well as—for the

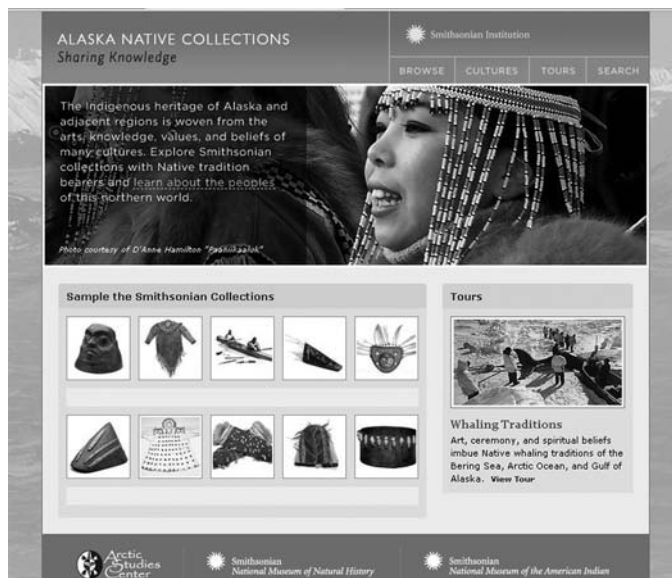


FIGURE 10. The Arctic Studies Center's Alaska office prepared *Sharing Knowledge: the Smithsonian Alaska Collections* (<http://alaska.si.edu>) in collaboration with Native elders and Second Story Interactive Studio provides interactive access to historic collections enriched by new Native documentation and oral history.



FIGURE 11. View of National Museum of Natural History exhibition *Arctic: A Friend Acting Strangely*, documenting the impacts of climate change on Arctic animals, landscapes, peoples, and cultures in ancient and modern times. (Photo by Chip Clark, NMNH)

first time in polar research—direct participation by northern peoples (Krupnik et al., 2004; Krupnik and Hovelsrud, 2006; Allison et al., 2007; NOAA, 2008; www.ipy.org).

Back in Washington, as preparations for the 2007–2008 IPY began to take shape amid the growing realization that climate warming was altering the Arctic world in ways that had never been imagined, the ASC curated an exhibit exploring the forces at work in this regional expression of global change (Figure 11). *Arctic: A Friend Acting Strangely* (2006), produced by the ASC with assistance from NOAA, NSF, NASA climate scholars as a major component of the U.S. Interagency Arctic Research Policy Committee’s SEARCH (Study of Arctic Environmental Change) Program, presented the science of Arctic warming and its effects on marine and terrestrial systems, animals, and people. Special attention was given to human observations of changes in the Arctic, such as rising temperatures, reductions in permafrost and sea ice, increases

in coastal erosion, shorter winters and longer summers, shifts in animal distributions, and the possible local extirpation of some species important for human subsistence (NOAA, 2008; <http://forces.si.edu/arctic>; www.arctic.noaa.gov). The exhibit helped focus the national climate debate from exclusive attention to geophysical drivers of global warming to its human and social “face” by illustrating the massive changes underway in the Arctic, long before such effects are expected to become pronounced at lower latitudes. Many of these issues are subjects of ongoing IPY science initiatives. The ASC activities most closely associated with these efforts are found in Aron Crowell’s research into culture and climate history in the Gulf of Alaska region (Crowell and Mann, 1998; Crowell, 2000; Crowell et al., 2003), William Fitzhugh’s (1998a, 2002b; Fitzhugh and Lamb, 1984) work on long-term culture and environmental change and human-environmental interactions in the circumpolar region, and Igor Krupnik’s (Krupnik and

Jolly, 2002; Huntington et al., 2004; Krupnik et al., 2004; Krupnik, 2006) collaborative projects on indigenous observations of sea ice, animal, and climate change in the Bering Sea, and Stephen Loring's (1996, 1998; 2001a; 2001b; 2008; Loring and Rosenmeier, 2005) work with indigenous community science and education.

It is clear that global warming, as dramatically demonstrated during the 2007 summer melt season, is going to be the most serious environmental issue facing the world in the coming century. Building upon the Smithsonian's long history of anthropological and archaeological collecting and research, the ASC has the capability for deep-time and broad panoramic studies of culture and environmental change. The Institution's ethnographic collections and archival records provide information on how northern peoples in many regions of the north have adapted to regional variation and changing conditions. Its archaeological collections, particularly from Alaska—as well as its recent long-term studies in the Eastern Arctic and Subarctic, the Russian North, Scandinavia, and most recently in Mongolia—provide cultural and environmental information on past changes of climate, environment, and culture that form the basis for studies and educational programs informing current conditions and trends. Movements of prehistoric and historic Indian and Eskimo cultures in Labrador, responses of past and present sea mammal hunters on St. Lawrence Island to changing sea ice and animal distributions, and cultural changes seen in Russia and Scandinavia have been taking place for thousands of years. One of the challenges of IPY 2007–2008 is to apply knowledge of these and similar records to the conditions we are facing today, and to assist local government and people living in these regions in making sensible choices for the future.

The Smithsonian's long history of northern studies from Kennicott's first steps in the Mackenzie District in 1858 to the modern day; its collections, research, and public programs; and its contemporary collaboration with northern communities and peoples give it unique capacity for contributions in this IPY and in this time of rapid social and environmental change. After 150 years of drawing upon the north as a source of collections and scholarly research exemplified in the Institution's first IPY efforts, Smithsonian science and education have shifted the polarity of its collecting, science, and educational activities back into the north so that its resources can contribute to meeting the challenges that lie ahead through the direct involvement of Alaskan and other Arctic people. Smithsonian scholars still research and publish at the forefront of their fields, curate collections, and work with the public in many capacities; but sharing the Smithsonian's historic

collections and archives and opening its facilities as venues for education and expanded awareness have become the guiding star for this new phase in our history. Nothing could be more important or more worthy of the course established by our founders in the earliest days of the Institution, for whom Arctic research is, as Henry deemed, “of no ordinary importance.”

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- Smithsonian Institution
<http://anthropology.si.edu>
<http://anthropology.si.edu/repatriation>
www.mnh.si.edu/arctic
- International Polar Year
www.ipy.org
- Arctic: A Friend Acting Strangely
<http://forces.si.edu/arctic>
- National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration
www.arctic.noaa.gov
- Sharing Knowledge, ASC Alaska Collection Project
<http://alaska.si.edu>

