

4,000 YEARS BEFORE US IN ALASKA, THERE WAS

DENBIGH

Every era has its visionaries. Some of Alaska's earliest were the Denbigh people. And their past is still present. Ancestors of modern Inupiat and Inuit, Denbigh people pioneered new tools, hunting tactics, and housing designs that set the stage for the next four millennia of high latitude living across the American Arctic.



Master Mariners

Denbigh was part of one of the longest and fastest migrations in human history. Their ancestors set out from Siberia, and Denbigh blossomed in northern Alaska. Expert mariners with a deep knowledge of sea ice and navigation, they regularly crisscrossed the waters of the Bering Strait. A few hundred years after Denbigh took shape in Alaska, their relatives pushed forward, this time across the Canadian Arctic and on to Greenland. Along the way they became the first to traverse the Northwest Passage—a route that 3,500 years later would thwart dozens of European expeditions. In total the migration covered 4,000 miles and arced halfway around the Earth.

Expert Toolmakers

Technological know-how was key to Denbigh's success in the unforgiving Arctic. Stone age gearheads, they crafted chert, obsidian, bone, antler, and ivory into dozens of tools—bird spears, engraving tools, sewing needles, even multiuse tools with interchangeable blades—all with equal concern for function and beauty. No Alaskan culture before or since has surpassed the skill and artistry of Denbigh stone tools. The first Alaskans to use bow and arrow, they stalked caribou and other game across Alaska's mountains and tundra. Denbigh hunters were equally at home at the ocean edge, wielding barbed harpoons to harvest seals.



- Ptarmigan
- Lake trout
- Ringed seal
- Caribou
- Musk ox

Scraper
Chert

All tools drawn to actual size.



Microblade knife
Obsidian blade



Knife
Chert blade



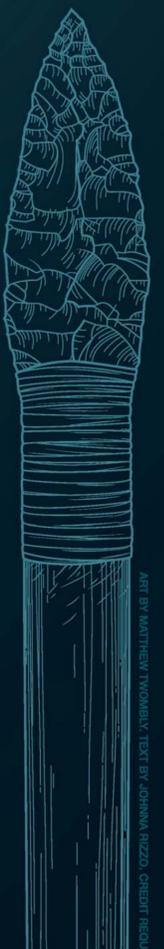
Arrow
Chert point



Dart
Antler point, obsidian inserts



Lance
Chert point



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Learn more about the marvels and mysteries of Denbigh at nps.gov/gaar.

Alaska Archaeology Month is coordinated by the Public Education Group of the Alaska Anthropology Association and its sponsoring agencies. Visit them at alaskaanthropology.org.