

6,000 YEARS BEFORE US IN ALASKA, THERE WAS

NORTHERN ARCHAIC



AFTER THE LAST ICE AGE the planet began warming, trees began expanding their range. It's these burgeoning forest borders of Alaska that Northern Archaic people—ancestors of Alutians—made their homeland. Millions of their environmental aunts and uncles died in the wilds. They moved to exploit resources and seasonal migrations. Caribou especially were central to Northern Archaic livelihood, providing not just food, but skins for clothing, housing, bedding, boats, and snowshoe mitts, plus animal fat for lamps, crafts, and hairpins. In some regions, an annual hunt would be about 70 caribou per family. Using stone lines created of stone caribou antlers and sinew, they'd harvest herds—in fall, some of thousands strong—sometimes with snares set up to the benefit, sometimes into traps, sometimes simply into the path of their weapons. Far distant places their weapons of choice were at their disposal. Elite archers, using their bodies like coiled springs, the hunters could hurl darts up to 50 yards with deadly precision. They didn't just aim at the side of an animal but at its heart or other vital organs—targeted and inches accurate.



MAIN FOOD SOURCES



THROWING THE DART



EVERYDAY TOOLS

Learn more about the marvels and mysteries of the Northern Archaic 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.

ILLUSTRATION BY JAMES HAMILTON