

GRINDALL ISLAND HISTORY

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Grindall Island was named in 1880 by W. H. Dall, USC & GS. The name Grindall was derived from Grindall Point, which is the southeast tip of Kasaan Peninsula on the East coast of Prince of Wales Island. Grindall Point was named by Captain George Vancouver R.N. after Captain Grindall R.N. and was discovered by James Johnstone, August 25, 1793. This point was sometimes referred to by traders as "Cone Point".

The water passage between Grindall Island and Kasaan Peninsula is called Grindall Passage. It is one mile long and frequently used by those entering Kasaan Bay from the north. The southwest end of the passage requires caution. A rock covered at high tide, lies off the southeast part of Grindall Point. It is surrounded by kelp reefs. A wooded islet and two bare rocks south of it lie close to the west end of Grindall Island. Southwest of the southernmost bare rock is a submerged kelp reef nearly 3/8 of a mile long.

In 1907, a Post Office was recorded as being at the head of the bight from Grindall Passage on the southeast shore of Grindall Point. A fair weather anchorage for small craft may be had at the head of the bight in 16 fathoms with a rocky bottom.

Grindall Island is about 1-1/2 miles long, 1/2 mile wide, heavily wooded, and has two knobby hills. The western hill is about 400 feet high, and the other about 250 feet high. Approach Point on the East tip of Grindall was named by a local fisherman and reported in 1904 by H. C. Fasset, USBF.

Grindall Island is said to have some significance to early Alaska Natives. The unoccupied Haida village of Kasaan lies several miles away from Grindall Island in Scowl Arm.

According to the Tongass Territorial land use records, fur farming permits for Grindall Island were filed by:

Peter L. Wie 5-10-1922

Jim Wycoff 12-2-1924

Darnell & P.E. & Darnell & Callie 3-17-1945, 12-09-1947

A number of islands in Southeast Alaska within the Tongass National Forest were occupied as fox fur farms. Each farm operator was charged an annual rental rate and was required to make a yearly report to the Forest Service as to the character and volume of business carried on through the year. Many islands outside of the forest reserves were also occupied by fur farmers. They had difficulty securing any valid claim to the land they occupied and used for operations. They were granted some protection though homesteading the land.

Island breeding was very successful when seriously undertaken. The prime prerequisites for island farming were area great enough to afford considerable range to foxes and sufficient distance from other land to prevent escape. Some farmers preferred to confine their foxes to corrals.

An ample supply of food was also necessary, as foxes became cannibalistic or weak and diseased with puny coats if underfed. If the islands natural food did not provide enough for foxes to subsist on, the farmers had various methods to provide the deficiency. Some farmers planted mice on the islands to provide food for their foxes. Other varied diets provided by the farmers consisted of fish, salted fish heads, several kinds of red meat, rice, dog biscuits, greens, and fat scraps. A prohibition against killing the great number of seagull and other proliferate seabirds for fox food was greatly objected to by the fur farmers. Farmers provided their young foxes with a diet of canned milk diluted with two parts water and a little sugar. Eggs were also desirable food for the young.

Farmers listed the following method as prevention for worms and internal parasites in foxes:

Burn all your old bones, pound them not to fine. Add equal amounts of clean charcoal from your kitchen stove, some being of hardwood, chopped fresh meat, something foxes like very well. Roll and rub the meat into the charcoal and pulverized bone until it loses all of its resemblance to meat in the mixture. Feed this to your foxes once a week.

In the roaring 20's fox fur became a whim of fashion, causing a tremendous fluctuation in the fur harvest because of the high demand. For many years the total take in Alaska from the wild state and fur farms exceeded twenty thousand furs annually. Then fox fur went out of fashion and prices dropped drastically causing many fur farmers to go out of business because of the unpredictable market. With the rapidly declining interest in fur some of the farmers chose to pursue new unproven types of farming in the territory. The fur take decreased to around one thousand by the mid 1950's and to no more than six to seven hundred by the mid 60's. In 1944 Southeast Alaska had only fifty-seven licensed farms where once 400 flourished. In 1957 the number of reported farms had declined to thirty-seven. By 1966 there were a total of four farms recorded in the entire State, and these were mainly mink farms.

In 1969 the Forest Service chose the old fur farm site on Grindall Island as a location for a recreational use cabin. They erected a twelve fourteen foot precut log cabin on the sunny bluff and located a mooring buoy for anchorage in the protected cove below it.

The Grindall area is popular with divers who enjoy expeditions around the rocky coast islands rich in sea life. It is also a well known fishing area for King Salmon, Halibut and rockfish. Because of its location to the Clarence Straits, tidal currents leave interesting drift on Grindall's shores for beachcombers to poke

through. The Stellar Sea Lion haul out on the islands South side offers photographic opportunity for the shutterbug enthusiasts.

In October 1991, Grindall Island cabin was conveyed by the Forest Service and the BLM to the State of Alaska. It came under the jurisdiction of the DNR/Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation with the local Park Ranger providing management and protecting the island' s natural resources for public recreation and enjoyment.

Resources:

Ketchikan Public Library & Museum Archives, Box 23 file # 12

The Alaska Book of Place Names

The 1907 Coastal Pilots Manual

Territorial Land Use Records provided by anthropologist John Autrey USFS

University of Alaska SE, Ketchikan campus; 1966 edition of Business and Economic Conditions Review

State of Alaska, DNR, Ketchikan Park Office, office files

Various reports and tips from local old timers