

# Hidden Falls Reunion

*By Mark McCallum, Archaeologist, Tongass NF*

Archaeologists gathered in Sitka over the July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend to celebrate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of excavations conducted at an ancient site at Hidden Falls on Baranof Island. Nine members of the excavation crew and some of their families joined Dr. Stan Davis, principal investigator of the archaeological work at Hidden Falls. One of the participants, Martin Stanford, is the archaeologist for the Ketchikan-Misty Fjords Ranger District. Tongass tribal government relations specialist John Autrey, also a member of the crew, says the project was “a stepping stone for our future careers” and he is proud that “the information gathered is still relevant and important today.”

Sitka District Ranger Carol Goularte welcomed the group at the district office on July 4 while

they got a chance to view the artifacts they collected. The following day the group boarded a catamaran to travel back in time as they made their way to the site at Hidden Falls.

While constructing a salmon hatchery at Hidden Falls in 1978, the State of Alaska exposed what turned out to be one of the major archaeological discoveries in Southeast Alaska. That February, Forest Service archaeologist Stan Davis identified layers of charcoal, shell, fish bones, and small stone artifacts buried below the forest floor. Limited by snow cover, Davis returned later that spring and summer and began to expose alternating layers of cultural artifacts and sterile soil. Initial results indicated the site had relatively great antiquity and warranted further examination.



*Ricky Lightfoot, CEO of the Crow Canyon Archaeological Center in Colorado, a world-class archeological research and educational institution, relives memories with Steve Klinger, also a former member of the Hidden Falls excavation crew, while reliving memories at the Wrangell Ranger District.*

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enduring the hardships of excavating in a rainy climate. For two summers the team labored to excavate a portion of the site slated for development. Meticulously excavating the site in controlled levels, they passed the soil through mesh screens, some as fine as window screen. Archaeologists noted 13 distinct layers of soil and cultural material while excavating and ultimately identified three cultural components, or major episodes of human occupation.

The oldest and deepest cultural component at Hidden Falls dates to about 9,500 years ago and yielded a variety of chipped stone tools. The hallmark tool of this earliest occupation are small blades of obsidian (a natural volcanic glass), known as microblades. Microblades, at least twice as long as they are wide, were often fastened to bone or wood implements to create a very effective cutting edge. Examination of these blades revealed the obsidian was obtained from two sources; one on Suemez Island and the other from Mt. Edziza, over 100 miles up the Stikine River. The significance of the Mt. Edziza connection is that it suggests people had trade networks in place by 9,500 years ago. Since trade networks do not appear overnight, the presence of Mt. Edziza obsidian suggests that people were present in southeast Alaska significantly earlier than 9,500 years ago.

Archaeological evidence indicates people abandoned the site at Hidden Falls, perhaps due to advancing glaciers, and did not reoccupy the site until about 4,600 years ago. By the time people returned to Hidden Falls their toolkit consisted of ground stone and bone tools. Microblades were absent and other chipped stone tools were not well represented. The people from this time period relied on a harvest of cod and other bottom fish, sea mammals, deer, and a few birds for their sustenance. Items left by people over a roughly 1,400 year period appear to reflect use of the site as a seasonal camp, with some evidence of a



*Hidden Falls Crew, 1978: Front: Craig Smith (sitting), Robin Voglesang, Amy Cockcroft, Barbara Langer, Martin Stanford. Back: Ricky Lightfoot (crew chief), Dale Vinson, Theresa Holtzapple, Steve Klingler, Roger Walkenhorst*

structure of modest dimensions.

The most recent component at Hidden Falls dates from about 3,000 to 1,300 years ago. Davis and his team noted a continued use of ground and chipped stone tools, although there appears to have been a greater emphasis on ground bone tools, such as harpoon points for sea mammal hunting. Other recovered artifacts reflect a traditional Northwest Coast adaptation, with stone adzes, axes, mauls, and other woodworking tools common. This layer also yielded large volumes of shellfish, including butter clams, littleneck clams, and mussels. As in the preceding cultural component, archaeological evidence suggests people used the site as a seasonal camp.

The scientific contribution gained by Dr. Davis and his hard-working crew have endured over the ensuing 30 years. Hidden Falls stands as one of the major archaeological studies conducted in southeast Alaska. Revelations about the earliest people in southeast Alaska is comparable to information gathered at GroundHog Bay in Icy Strait and On Your Knees Cave on Prince of Wales Island. Dr. Robert Ackerman excavated the 10,000 year-old site of GroundHog Bay between 1965 and 1973. Paleontologist Tim Heaton was the first to recognize a cultural component at On Your Knees Cave, with discovery of a human jawbone and other items dating to about 10,000 years ago.

Ultimately, the archaeological discoveries made at Hidden Falls, combined with those made at GroundHog Bay and On Your Knees Cave, challenge the long-held theory of the Bering land bridge as being the primary entry point of people into the New World. Mounting evidence suggests that the peopling of the New World was much more complex than previously realized. The notion of a coastal migration has gained traction in part due to the scientific contributions made by Dr. Stan Davis and his diligent team of archaeologists.