

22. CULTURAL RESOURCES

22.1 Introduction

The purpose of the cultural resources study was to characterize the existing cultural resources on lands in the mine and transportation-corridor study areas in the Bristol Bay drainages (Figure 1-4 in Chapter 1). Cultural resources may include historic buildings, structures, and landscapes; prehistoric and historic surface and subsurface sites; and traditional- and religious-use areas. The objectives of the cultural resources field surveys in the Bristol Bay drainages were to locate, identify, and describe documented and previously undocumented archaeological, historic, and ethnographic cultural resources in the vicinity of the Pebble Deposit and at exploratory drilling locations for the Pebble Project.

Cultural resources research and field work were conducted during 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, and 2008. In order to characterize the cultural resources in the mine and transportation-corridor study areas, researchers reviewed the Alaska Heritage Resources Survey database, literature, and archival data; conducted cultural resource interviews and consultations; and conducted field surveys. The review of existing data regarding cultural resources in the study areas and the effort to identify previously undocumented cultural resources through interviews, consultations, and field surveys helped to inform researchers as to where and what manner of cultural resources were likely to be found in the study areas.

During the 2004 through 2008 field seasons cultural resource field surveys, subsurface testing, and monitoring of ground-disturbing activities were conducted primarily within the Pebble mining claims boundary on locations that might be considered for installation and operation of mine infrastructure or for geological investigations. Because of the extent of the area to be surveyed, survey efforts were focused on areas deemed to have a high or moderate probability for discovery of previously undocumented cultural resources. The only surveys conducted in the transportation-corridor study area were in the vicinity of the Newhalen River and at a drilling-core storage area in Iliamna and were both in October 2006.

22.2 Results and Discussion

Previous cultural resources surveys in or near the study areas have resulted in the identification of a prehistoric cultural sequence from some time after the retreat of glaciers covering the area through the first, presumably proto-Dena'ina (Athabascan), users of the area. Sites of Dena'ina origin were contemporary with or were replaced by Yup'ik Eskimo-style structures and materials in some locations, such as Newhalen and Pedro Bay. This indicates the likelihood that both Athabascan and Eskimo types of material culture and sites may be present in the study areas. Cultural resources from late 18th century Russian and later American exploration and development in the region also are present in the study areas.

The relative remoteness of the Pebble Deposit likely limits the number of cultural resource sites and the extent of cultural deposits in the claim boundary area. The transportation-corridor study area, however, traverses areas where possibly both Yup'ik and Dena'ina people have lived for several thousand years, increasing the likelihood that archaeological or culturally significant sites may be found in this area. Areas with a higher likelihood of having archaeological or culturally significant sites include the Newhalen River corridor and other stream corridors, lakes, and mountain passes, as well as the shores of Iliamna Lake and its tributary streams. All these areas have high subsistence-food productivity. As of 2008, there were 20 cultural resource sites and no documented place names within the claim boundary compared to 62 cultural resource sites and 103 place names in the transportation-corridor study area.

Based on information from the Alaska Heritage Resources Survey database, 85 documented cultural resource sites are located in the mine and transportation-corridor study areas. Of these 85 documented sites, two (Russian Orthodox churches in Pedro Bay and Nondalton) are listed on the National Register of Historic Places, five (all northeast of Iliamna Lake) have been determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, 17 have been determined not eligible, and the remaining 61 have had no determinations of eligibility.

The compilation of place-name data for the Bristol Bay region resulted in the identification of 119 place names in the Bristol Bay drainages study areas. Sixteen place names are associated with locations in the mine study area, and 103 place names are associated with locations in the transportation-corridor study area. Cultural resources interviews, as well as subsistence and traditional knowledge interviews, in communities in the study areas resulted in identification of 565 features in the study areas. The cultural resources consultations and the collection of place names provided additional cultural context for the area and assisted researchers in determining the possible location and manner of cultural resources in the area.

Cultural resource discoveries that resulted from the 2004 through 2008 field surveys in the claim boundary area include the following:

- Two prehistoric lithic (stone tools) sites (Alaska Heritage Resource Survey codes ILI-00193 and ILI-00194) along the South Fork Koktuli River.
- One rock circle and nearby rock stack (ILI-00212) on a large glacial rubble pile south of the Cone.
- Two possible tent rings (ILI-00203 and ILI-00204) on a south-facing ridge of Kaskanak Mountain.
- Several isolated lithic finds (ILI-00196, ILI-00201, ILI-00202, ILI-00205, ILI-00207, ILI-00208, ILI-00209, ILI-00218, and ILI-00219).

Evidence of more recent use also was discovered during the surveys. These discoveries include the following:

- Subsistence camps and hunting sites along the South Fork Koktuli River, around Big Wiggly Lake (ILI-00213 through ILI-00217), and on the high ridges and benches of Kaskanak Mountain.

Cultural Resources—Bristol Bay Drainages

- Isolated modern objects (e.g., cartridge scatters, a fragmentary teacup, and metal cans and wires [ILI-00220]) observed throughout the mining claims boundary.

Cultural Resources—Bristol Bay Drainages



Archaeologists documenting an ancestral site near the northeast tributary of Upper Talarik Creek.



An ancestral stone tool found on the surface by a bear guard/cultural advisor accompanying the archaeologists.



Archaeologist and bear guard/cultural advisor documenting a historic subsistence camp among cottonwoods.