

3,000-year-old mask found in Aleutians

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A whalebone mask discovered at an Alaskan archaeological site was probably broken during an Aleut funeral 3,000 years ago, scientists said.

Mike Yarborough, who heads the dig on Unalaska Island in the Aleutian chain, told The Anchorage Daily News the mask is about 2,000 years older than any other to have been found. Only the upper half of the mask was found and it had old cracks in it.

Archaeologists began working on the hillside because a new bridge is to be built there, replacing an old wooden-decked one. The dig, originally scheduled to last only a month, has been extended because the site has proved to be much richer than anyone expected.

The village was inhabited at a time when the climate in the Aleutians was much colder and the islands were surrounded by ice year-round. The inhabitants lived in stone houses with under-floor air spaces for heating.

The mask resembles a 1,000-year-old one found on the Alaskan peninsula. Denise Rankin, vice president of the tribal corporation on Unalaska, said the eyes and other features are also familiar to her.

"They look just like an Aleut face," she said.

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