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BSNC:	Historic	and	Cemetery	Sites
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PRELIMINARY INVENTORY

AA11788

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The Kaltag Portage runs for 90 miles along the Unalakleet River, across a short divide, down the Kaltag River to the Yukon. The western terminus is at the Eskimo Village of Unalakleet on Norton Sound and the eastern terminus is at the Indian Village of Kaltag on the Yukon River. Protohistorically the trail was used for trade between the coast and the interior, historically it was part of the dog sled mail carriers trail and recently it has been incorporated into the longest North American sled dog race trail, the Iditarod.

Indians of the Interior.

The portage provided an avenue of contact and trade between the Eskimos of Norton Sound and the Lower Koyukon Indians. As a consequence of the increase in trade beginning in the early 1800's a number of villages were established along the Unalakleet River occupied by a group of specialized traders. These people were recognized as distinct from either the coastal Eskimos or the Lower Koyukon Indians.

According to D.J. Ray, "from the 1840's on, Indians lived on the upper Unalakleet River in what had been Eskimo Territory." (Ray 1975:105). They were recorded by Lt. Zagoskin in 1844 as Ulukagmyut, after their main village at Ulukuk (Chiroski), associated both by language and custom to the Athabascans. (Zagoskin 1844:136-137). Julis Jette J.S., a priest in Nulato at the turn of the century, mentions these people as T¼amas rotana, "T¼amaas Hot'anna", who were named after T¼amas, a mountain on the portage approximately 60 miles from Kaltag and T¼amas Hena, 25 miles of tundra west of T¼amas mountain. The T¼amas Hot'anna were "a group of people who used to live at this point are said to have raided the Koyukuk settlements between 1840 and 1850." (Jette dictionary TL). Lutz #4 Unalakleet R7W, T18S continuation from page one

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These "Portage Indians" were most probably a mix of both lower Koyukuk Indians and coastal Eskimos. Jette reported that the lower Koyukon Indians considered these people as Eskimo (Jette migrations:5) and the Eskimos apparently considered them Indians. (Ray 1975:105). Their main function as traders was noted by Zagoskin who recorded; "these people never engaged in hunting but spent all their time in trading or travelling." (1844:137). There has been almost no archeological work along the portage which could provide additional information as to the identity and cultural affiliations of these people.

Lutz describes this site as a small village site which consists of six semi-subterranean and eleven cache pits. He also comments :the spatial arrangements of the houses and cache pits, as well as the overall site size differs considerably from Site #3, which is in the same UTM grid. It would be interesting to excavate these two sites in order to determine the reasons for these differences." (Lutz:p.c.)

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Bruce Lutz: personal communication

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