

U.S. ARMY GARRISON FORT WAINWRIGHT QUARTERLY UPDATE FOR ALASKA NATIVE TRIBES

July 2014, Vol. 12/No. 3

This is a quarterly update on United States Army Garrison Fort Wainwright activities and issues of interest to federally recognized tribes in Alaska.

Tracking Ancient Sheep Hunters in the Black Rapids Training Area

contributed by Dr. Julie Esdale, USAG FWA Archaeologist

The Black Rapids Training Area is a stunning stop between Glenallen and Delta Junction. Its mountainous terrain hosts spectacular views of the surrounding Alaska Range and Black Rapids Glacier to the west. The area is home today to Dall sheep, golden eagles, and peregrine falcons.

Black Rapids Training Area is currently home to the Northern Warfare Training Center. Military use of the area began in the late 1940's for arctic survival, mountaineering,



Notched atlatl (spear thrower) dart point at site XMH-1505



Projectile point discovery at site XMH-1497



Archaeologists discover artifacts on the surface in Black Rapids Training Area.

ski training, and cold weather tactical testing. Training in alpine environments has become increasingly important in recent decades as global conflict turned to mountainous areas including Afghanistan and Iraq.

Archaeological surveys of the training area in the past two years for road repair, range creation, and other activities associated with cold-weather alpine training have documented ten prehistoric archaeological sites. Due to the steep terrain and strong winds, little sediment has accumulated over the area and ancient sites are found right on the ground surface. All sites discovered thus far (surveys are on-going during the summer of 2014) are isolated projectile point bases and small scatters of flakes typical of point re-sharpening. All evidence suggests that people passed through the region quickly, perhaps searching out sheep moving through the area. No camp sites or hunting blinds have yet been discovered. Although we have no idea how long people have been using the area, a notched projectile point, which dates from 4,000-6,000 years ago in central Alaska, was found at one site suggesting that people have been hunting in the Black Rapids area for thousands of years.

CSU Graduate Student and USAG FWA Wetlands Crew Study Sheep Habitat for Army

A multi-year project is happening on Molybdenum Ridge in Donnelly Training Area, southwest of Delta Junction, and Black Rapids Training Area, south on the Richardson Highway. Both areas are being studied to assess how they are used by Dall sheep. Jeremy Dertein, a graduate student from Colorado State University, is studying the areas for his graduate project and is working cooperatively with the USAG FWA Environmental Division wetlands crew to document where sheep go and what they forage.

The upland areas are of interest to the Army for development of High-Angle Marksmanship Ranges (HAMRs). Increasing fighting skills in mountainous terrain, where targets are successfully acquired from firing points both uphill and downhill from the target, gained importance during combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. It is now part of Soldier readiness being emphasized in Alaska as part of mountain and cold weather warfare training. To facilitate the range development, the Army needs a better understanding of the habitat sheep use in the training areas—where sheep travel, what resources they use, and when they are present. With this knowledge, Army range developers can more responsibly develop areas that meet the mission of increasing Soldier readiness while protecting, avoiding, or scheduling around this important resource and its habitat.

Based on what is already known about Dall sheep behavior and habitat needs, activity is being recorded by 54 game cameras—45 at Molybdenum Ridge and 9 at Black Rapids—mounted throughout the highland areas at locations calculated as the most probable areas for observation. Each camera is equipped to record images at one hour intervals and in response to heat/motion.

In the project's second season, the USAG FWA wetlands staff set up camp at these training areas in July and did the arduous work of visiting these camera locations. The 9-person crew divided into teams and hiked or flew to each site, working for 2-2.5 hours at each location. Dependent on weather and destination, some teams hiked upward of 8 miles per day with elevation changes in the hundreds of feet over the course of a workday. The traversed terrain ranged from steep rock and scree-covered hillsides to hummock/tussock marshes to dwarf birch thicket.



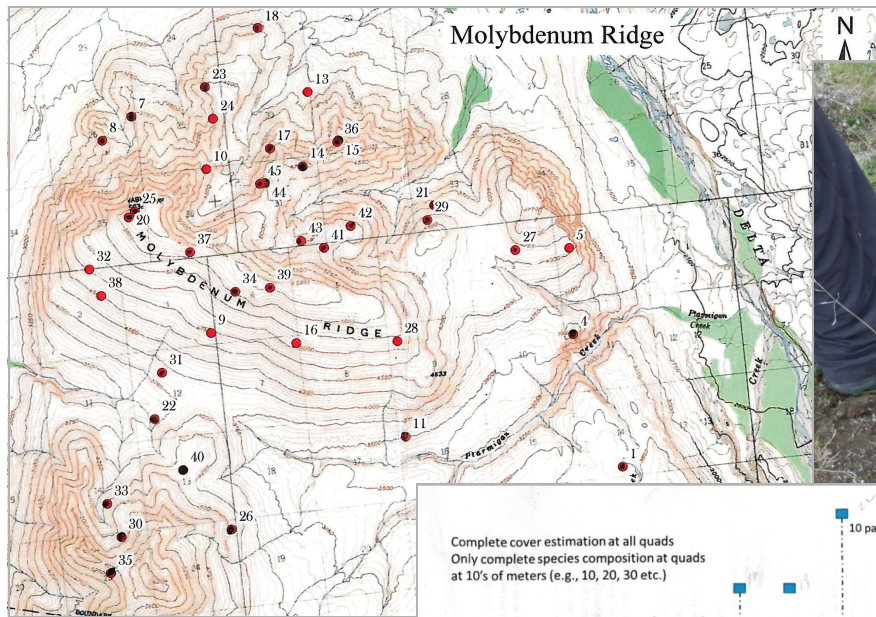
During this field season, batteries and SD cards were changed in each camera, cards being taken back to Colorado for analysis of the thousands of images. Crews found that the cameras had withstood the frequently inclement alpine weather that ranges from hot sun to harsh winter bluster to rain, sleet, and blowing snow (even in July). Several cameras had succumbed to wildlife, destroyed by curious brown bears or itchy caribou.

At each camera location, 30 plots of vegetation were examined by wetlands crew members within the viewing area of the camera. Vegetation was measured according to coverage amounts and variety of species present in the sampled areas. In half the plots, a detailed inventory of species was taken.

As part of this or any other training area development project, cultural and natural resources must be assessed. The USAG FWA archaeological and natural resources field crews began surveying the area in 2012 at the project's beginning. Archaeologists documented several locations at Molybdenum Ridge that will be further investigated if needed once the HAMR project is further developed. At Black Rapids Training Area, archaeologists examined a very specific area of potential effect (APE) for the HAMR there. No cultural materials were found within the APE as a result of either surface examination or shovel tests.

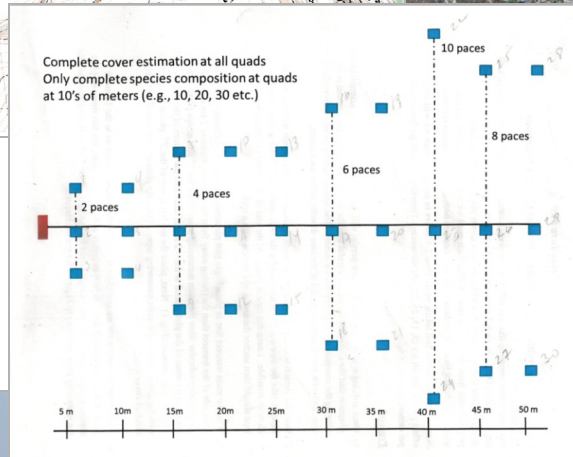
In addition to sheep, images of other wildlife-to-camera encounters have been recorded. Bears have been documented swiping a camera down. Ground squirrels have been seen perched atop downed cameras. Caribou have been caught rubbing their faces and antlers on the camera stands. Additionally, the cameras record time, date, stage of the moon, and temperature, giving a wealth of documentation about the changes in weather in those high climates.

The project is scheduled to continue until summer of 2016.



Game cameras are placed across the ridge at locations where the probability is high for sheep to pass.

Plots of vegetation (right) are mapped out for assessment.



(Above) Crew members study up on vegetation coverage determinations before going out the first day.

Data collection occurred regardless of weather conditions.



Snow (above) fell on the camp in mid-July. The crew's camp, at approximately 4,800 feet elevation, was subject to quickly changing weather that could switch from sunny to foggy to snowy to sunny over the course of hours.

(Right) Crew members get a lesson in game camera maintenance. Batteries and SD cards were replaced; camera mounts were replaced as needed and programming was checked before they were set for the next year's data collection.



***Camp Cheechako* Introduces Military Dependents to Life in Alaska**

The Directorate of Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation's Youth Sponsorship Program is hosting three day-camps for newly stationed students this summer. Called *Camp Cheechako*, the events provide relocation, school, and life transition support for military dependents at Fort Wainwright. The camps take most of a week to orient the new students to the Fairbanks community and Alaska, while they make new friends and enjoy a summer excursion.

In addition to exploring a local gold mine, leisure activities at Pioneer Park, and areas of interest at Fort Wainwright, the youth visited the Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitor Center and learned about Alaska Native cultures with the Fort Wainwright Native Liaison.

At the Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitor Center, each group has visited the Alaska Public Lands Information Center and been given an introduction to the Interior's seasonal round and Athabascan culture through exhibits there. Additionally, Dixie Alexander of the Tanana Chiefs Conference cultural programs department has worked with each group, creating bead and hide jewelry and talking about Athabascan cultures. Following that experience, the Fort Wainwright Native Liaison has spoken with the youth about the other Native cultures around the state, life in each unique region, and subsistence practices and resources.



Eielson Air Force Base is hosting RED FLAG training exercises August 7-22 and October 2-17, 2014. Questions and concerns about these exercises can be submitted to the 11th Air Force Public Affairs Office at 800-538-6647; the 3rd Wing Public Affairs Office in Anchorage at 907-552-5756; or 354th Fighter Wing Public Affairs Office on Eielson at 907-377-2116. For more about the information needed by Public Affairs to investigate a noise complaint or for flight rules during RED FLAG exercises, see <http://www.eielson.af.mil/questions/topic.asp?id=1249>.

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