Heritage and Archaeology on the North Slope of Alaska: The Nuvuk Archaeology Project

Anne M. Jensen

UIC Science LLC, PO Box 955, Barrow, AK 99723 USA

The Nuvuk Archaeology Project provides opportunities for North Alaska high school students to participate in archaeological work at a rapidly eroding village at Point Barrow, Alaska. Work began in 1998 at community request and expanded to include students in 2005. Students have been full participants in both the fieldwork and the laboratory.

The project is successful from a scientific standpoint, shedding light on the questions of Thule origins and migration, and extending the known distribution of the Ipiutak culture 500 km north. A cooperating ancient DNA project is filling in the North Alaskan gap in aDNA data, with the permission and interest of the community.

Students learn about doing science (particularly archaeology) and about site stewardship. Most student participants have gone on to college, and one has graduated with a degree in anthropology. The excitement of participating in a real research project, where new information is being learned, seems to be an important part of these decisions.

The project includes extensive public outreach. Digital media are proving to be particularly useful in reaching the local community, as well as those at a distance.