

Dr. Aron Crowell



The Truth of Oral Tradition: Archaeological Confirmation of Northern Indigenous Histories

When: **12:00-1:00pm on Friday, September 4, 2015**

Where: **Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage**, Smithsonian Institution, 600 Maryland Ave. SW, Suite 2001, Washington, D.C. 20024

Please RSVP to PedersenA@si.edu to ensure event capacity and record staff attendance.

Abstract:

Stories of remarkable events that occurred centuries ago—from wars, migrations, and famines, to geological cataclysms—have been preserved in the oral traditions of Arctic and Subarctic peoples, comprising an irreplaceable endowment of intangible cultural heritage. Yet anthropologists have questioned the "historicity" of oral tradition, suggesting that accurate accounts could not possibly be transmitted through scores of generations. However, a new perspective is emerging from archaeological and geological studies that confirm the reality of these events and provide radiocarbon dates for when they took place. Using examples from Alaska, this presentation will focus on the process of bringing together two very different ways of knowing about the past.

Bio:

Dr. Aron L. Crowell is a Smithsonian anthropologist and Alaska Director of the National Museum of Natural History's Arctic Studies Center. His research and publications in cultural anthropology and archaeology reflect collaborations with indigenous communities of the north and with major museums and research institutions. He is the curator and project director of the Smithsonian exhibition [*Living Our Cultures, Sharing Our Heritage: The First Peoples of Alaska*](#) at the Anchorage Museum, and of previous exhibits, including [*Looking Both Ways: Heritage and Identity of the Alutiiq People*](#). He directs a wide range of current programs in Alaskan Native heritage, languages, and arts. Crowell directs archaeological projects around the Gulf of Alaska and currently leads National Science Foundation-funded research on the human and environmental history of Yakutat Bay. His doctorate in anthropology is from the University of California at Berkeley and he is an affiliate faculty member of the University of Alaska.

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