

ATSIAQ ALASUAQ (1938–2023)

Atsiauq Alasuaq was born on the land in 1938, in a place called Tikkuut on southern Baffin Island, Nunavut. Around 1954, at 17-years old, he and his family moved south to the Tatsittuq and Kimmirut (Lake Harbour) area for approximately 10 years (Fig. 1). During that time, he travelled back and forth between Kimmirut and the Tatsittuq camp whenever his family needed supplies. He knew and consulted with the heads of each camp during his extensive travels around southern Baffin Island, and he lived in many different camps depending on the year and the season. Alasuaq moved to the community of Kinngait (Cape Dorset) around 1965, where he had his first job working at the Co-op.

As an Elder, Alasuaq was well known and respected for his deep knowledge of the land, ice, ocean, animals, Inuktitut language, and Inuit culture (Fig. 2). Alasuaq ran the local Elders group in Kinngait for many years and was frequently invited for interviews and workshops by researchers, government departments, and Inuit organizations. He was passionate about Inuit culture and language initiatives, sitting on many boards and playing leadership roles within and beyond Kinngait.

I had the honour and pleasure of working with Alasuaq since my second visit to Kinngait in April 2004. He was among the first round of interviews conducted in Kinngait, and we connected in all my eight visits to Kinngait over 18 years until his passing in late January 2023. He was big in stature and personality, very welcoming, open, and always energetic. He wanted youth to learn and develop the knowledge and skills that he had learned from growing up on the land, encouraging them to be confident and safe in hunting on the land, water, and ice. Alasuaq was also adamant that I needed to see and experience some of the ice conditions he talked about in interviews. He helped me to learn and appreciate the many nuances of sea ice terminology and safety as he led Pootoogoo Elee and me as the first people to walk on newly formed ice in front of the community in November 2004. He also took us on a trip to the floe edge in January 2005. He was just as comfortable and passionate about passing on his knowledge on the ice as in meeting rooms. Alasuaq embraced the many forms that learning could take (e.g., through travel on the ice, documenting terminology, interpreting satellite images, creating maps, developing educational materials, attending workshops, and arranging gatherings in the community).

Alasuaq contributed to three sea ice-focused projects, each building upon the other, between 2004 and 2011 (Laidler and Elee 2006, 2008; Laidler et al. 2010, 2011; and see project list below). In particular, he was a leader throughout 12 years of development and refinement of the Kinngait Sea Ice Glossary (Alasuaq et al. 2023), a bilingual (Inuktitut/English) compilation of sea ice terms and descriptions specific to the Sikusiilarmiut (people of Sikusiilaq “where there is no ice”) dialect. Despite



FIG. 1. Atsiauq Alasuaq. Photo credit: Sean Guistini.



FIG. 2. Alasuaq on the sea ice (used with permission from Alasuaq’s family). Photo credit: Gita Ljubicic.

many challenges and delays, he was patient and persistent, wanting to see this resource finalized for the youth of Kinngait today and in the future. I am so glad I was able to hand him the final draft glossary in November 2022, but also very sad that it took so long. At that time, he was near the end of his battle with cancer and did not get to be part of the community release of the glossary on 28 September 2023.

I felt a strong connection with Alasuaq, and he was the key motivator to continue with the glossary on sea ice terminology despite many challenges and delays. We could never communicate directly through a shared language, and yet I felt like we understood each other. We worked through many skilled interpreters, and I am grateful to Pootoogoo Elee, Adamie Nuna, Nathaniel Joanisie, and Aksaqtunguaq Ashoona for facilitating the opportunity to work with and learn from Alasuaq. He was so generous sharing his knowledge because he wanted it recorded for future generations.

Alasuaq will be greatly missed, and his legacy lives on in the many lives he has touched.

PROJECT LIST

Alasuaq made great contributions to a number of significant projects and deeply influenced some of this author's published works:

Inuit siku (sea ice) atlas.

<https://sikuatlas.ca/>

StraightUpNorth. Ice through Inuit eyes: Characterizing the importance of sea ice processes, use, and change around three Nunavut communities: 2003–2007. Accessed November 8, 2023.

<https://straightupnorth.ca/ice-through-inuit-eyes/>

StraightUpNorth. Community-based sea ice and weather forecasting: 2007–2008. Accessed 8 November 2023.

<https://straightupnorth.ca/nunavut-sea-ice-weather-forecasting/>

StraightUpNorth. Inuit sea ice use and occupancy project: 2006–2011. Accessed 8 November 2023.

<https://straightupnorth.ca/inuit-sea-ice-use-occupancy-project/>

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Alasuaq, A., Kellypalik, M., Etidlouie, E., Kellypalik, M.S., Etidlouie, U., Qatisya, Q., and Tapaungai, Q. 2023. Kinngait tukisigiarutingat sikuup mitsaanut [Kinngait sea ice glossary]. Edited by Ljubicic, G., Elee, P., Joanasie, N., Nuna, A., Kilabuk, J., Kolola, O., and Ashoona, A. Iqaluit and Hamilton: Nunavut Arctic College Media and McMaster University.

<https://straightupnorth.files.wordpress.com/2023/10/siku-kinngait-2023-final-sm.pdf>

Laidler, G.J., and Elee, P. 2006. Sea ice processes and change: Exposure and risk in Cape Dorset, Nunavut. In: Riewe, R., and Oakes, J., eds. *Climate change: Linking traditional and scientific knowledge*. Winnipeg and Quebec City: University of Manitoba Press and ArcticNet. 155–175.

———. 2008. Human geographies of sea ice: Freeze/thaw processes around Cape Dorset, Nunavut, Canada. *Polar Record* 44(228):51–76.

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0032247407007061>

Laidler, G.J., Elee, P., Ikummaq, T., Joamie, E., and Aporta, C. 2010. Mapping sea-ice knowledge, use, and change in Nunavut, Canada (Cape Dorset, Igloolik, Pangnirtung). In: Krupnik, I., Aporta, C., Gearheard, S., Laidler, G. J., and Kielsen-Holm, L., eds. *SIKU: Knowing our ice, documenting Inuit sea-ice knowledge and use*. Dordrecht: Springer. 45–80.

https://doi.org/10.1007/978-90-481-8587-0_3

Laidler, G.J., Hirose, T., Kapfer, M., Ikummaq, T., Joamie, E., and Elee, P. 2011. Evaluating the Floe Edge Service: How well can SAR imagery address Inuit community concerns around sea ice change and travel safety? *The Canadian Geographer* 55(1):91–107.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1541-0064.2010.00347.x>

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