

Lake Clark

Qizhjah Vena

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

National Park and Preserve
Alaska



Dena'ina

Elnena

This is *Dena'ina Elnena*, or land of the Dena'ina people.

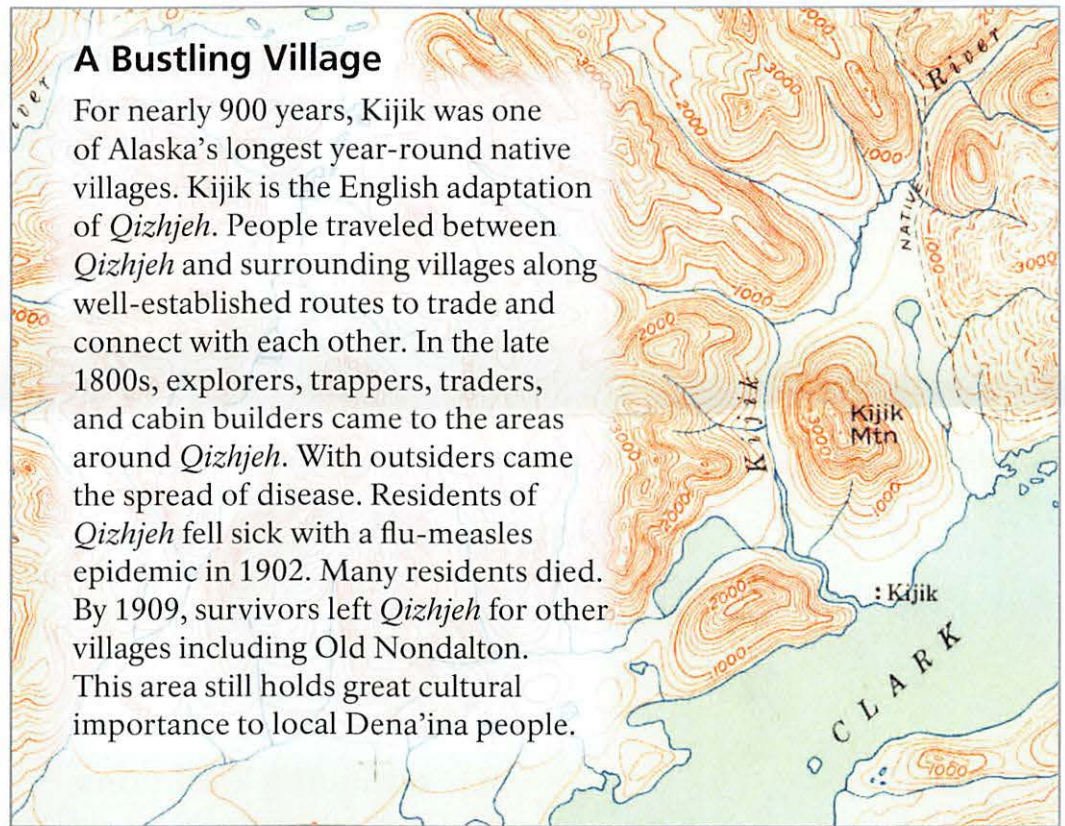
In Dena'ina culture, the land and the people are deeply interwoven.

The Dena'ina Athabascan people have lived in the Lake Clark region for thousands of years. Before this area was part of Lake Clark National Park, it was called *Qizhjah Vena* meaning 'a place where people gather lake' in the Dena'ina language. *Qizhjah Vena* (Lake Clark) is the ancestral homeland of the Dena'ina people. The land and water continue to support, shape, and sustain the Dena'ina culture.

The first human settlers came more than 10,000 years ago. People migrated to the Lake Clark region for many reasons, including an abundance of salmon, caribou, moose, and edible plants. The energy of this place continues to influence the language, stories, songs, dance, ceremony and deeply held values of the Dena'ina people.

A Bustling Village

For nearly 900 years, Kijik was one of Alaska's longest year-round native villages. Kijik is the English adaptation of *Qizhjah*. People traveled between *Qizhjah* and surrounding villages along well-established routes to trade and connect with each other. In the late 1800s, explorers, trappers, traders, and cabin builders came to the areas around *Qizhjah*. With outsiders came the spread of disease. Residents of *Qizhjah* fell sick with a flu-measles epidemic in 1902. Many residents died. By 1909, survivors left *Qizhjah* for other villages including Old Nondalton. This area still holds great cultural importance to local Dena'ina people.



"Our culture has all the tools passed on from our ancestors: we are meteorologists, diplomats, artists, architects, linguists, botanists, biologists, midwives, and astronomers. The essence of being native is ingenuity and creativity."

- Dena'ina Steering Committee from *Dena'ina Elnena, A Celebration*



"Fish Camp is important because that's where we put up our fish for the winter, for our winter supply of fish...that's the only time that we could put up our dry fish, and canned fish, and salt fish, freeze fish, and that's the important thing"

- Olga Balluta

Cultural Connections

The Dena'ina people still depend on hunting, fishing, and gathering to put food on the table and practice cultural traditions. In Alaska, this is called subsistence. Access and knowledge to get wild foods means food security and continued connection to the land. These communities are not a part of Alaska's road system. People must use what is available in this remote place. For Dena'ina people, passing on the traditional values of living off the land means the survival of their culture. Traditional values include sustaining by never taking more than is needed and respect for the natural environment. For thousands of years, sockeye salmon have been important for food and survival. Today, many local residents, not just Dena'ina people, are connected to the environment through subsistence practices.

Ancestral Trails

Ancestral trails and travel corridors branched out from *Qizhjah* to the north, west, and east. The trails to the east went to the Cook Inlet coast, where both the Dena'ina and the Alutiiq people (a group of maritime people originating in the Kodiak Archipelago) travelled and traded. For at least 3,500 years, trails and small settlements along the coast have been used for hunting, fishing, and trading. Those who passed through left their mark on the landscape. Materials as old as 10,000 years, such as stone tools, have been discovered in some of these sites.

Place Names

Places in Lake Clark have different meanings to many people. Most places in Lake Clark have Dena'ina place names that predate any other names assigned to them. Original place names tell the story of the Dena'ina people's relationship to that place and remind us that people have been part of this place for a long time. Dena'ina people give names to places to better remember them, to help document what they find, or represent events.

Dena'ina Place Names & English Translations

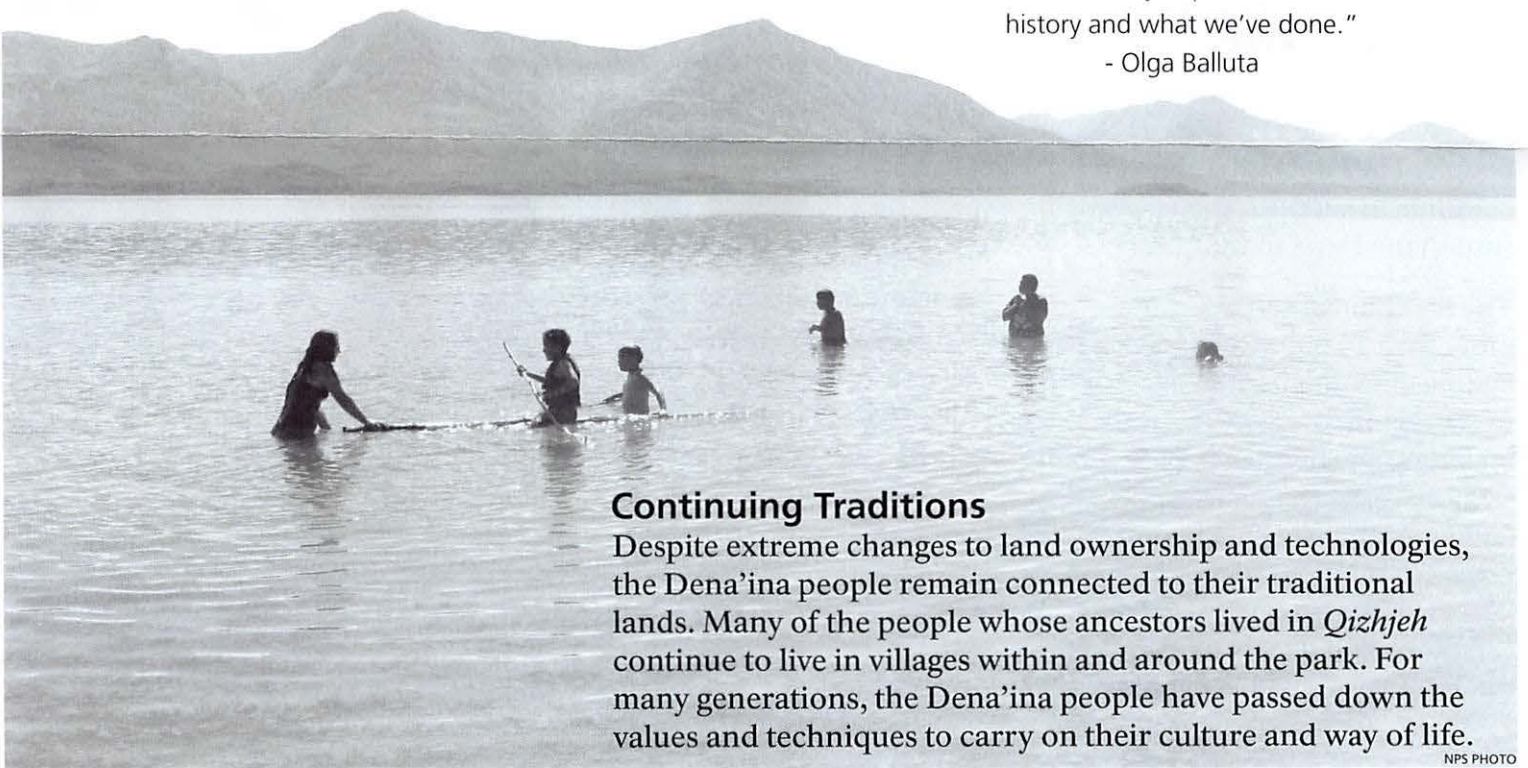
Chayi ch'k'edlesht
'where we cooked tea'

Dilah Vena
'fish swim in lake'
(Telaquana Lake)

K'qineyaht
'where they pick berries'

"The names are very important. It's about our history and what we've done."

- Olga Balluta



Continuing Traditions

Despite extreme changes to land ownership and technologies, the Dena'ina people remain connected to their traditional lands. Many of the people whose ancestors lived in *Qizhjah* continue to live in villages within and around the park. For many generations, the Dena'ina people have passed down the values and techniques to carry on their culture and way of life.

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