

A L A S K A S T A T E M U S E U M S

ALASKA STATE MUSEUM, JUNEAU ❖ SHELDON JACKSON MUSEUM, SITKA

Sheldon Jackson Museum

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DECEMBER ARTIFACT OF THE MONTH **INUPIAT ESKIMO ICE CREEPERS FROM WALES**

The Sheldon Jackson Museum's Artifact of the Month for December is apropos for winter: a pair of Inupiat Eskimo ice creepers. The artifact comes from Wales, a small Inupiat village located on Cape Prince of Wales, at the western tip of the Seward Peninsula. Winter temperatures there range from -10 to 6 degrees and annual precipitation is 100 inches, including 35 inches of snow. This pair of ice creepers, collected by Sheldon Jackson in the 1890s, is an object many Alaskans would easily recognize and use today.

The ice creepers are carved from ivory, with hide straps. The short ivory plates are smooth on one side and have deeply grooved pyramidal shapes on the opposite side. Much smaller than today's crampons, they might not be as efficient on a climb of Denali, but for keeping balance in the snow and ice of the Bering Sea region, their usefulness is as important today as it was 150 years ago. After metal became more readily available, small pegs of steel would be inserted into the ivory base replacing the jagged edges of the original creepers. Eventually modern equivalents made entirely of metal supplanted the ivory creepers.

The ice creepers will be on exhibit through December 31 and can be viewed on our web site at www.museums.state.ak.us.

Winter hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. General admission is \$3. Visitors 18 and younger, Friends of the Sheldon Jackson Museum, and those with passes are admitted free of charge.

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