



A totem pole currently under construction in Hoonah tells the story of the Huna Tlinglit people leaving Glacier Bay



## History & Culture of Glacier Bay.



The first people known to have called Glacier Bay home are the Huna Tlinglit. Although recovered artifacts date Huna settlements in the Bay back to 1250, if you ask a local Huna Tlinglit, they'll tell you their people's history in this region predates even this early estimate. But however long their history may be, undoubtedly, the Huna Tlinglit are the people of this land. Every aspect of Tlinglit culture embraces the very nature of Glacier Bay, celebrating its resources and overwhelming abundance, while meeting the inherent challenges of life in the shadow of a massive and unpredictable glacier.

In the early days of human habitation, Glacier Bay was truly a place of abundance. Tlinglit art and legends describe a broad, grass-covered valley, replete with freshwater streams bursting with salmon. Berry bushes bloomed across sunlit meadows and mature forests provided everything from medicinal herbs to building materials. Certainly, the massive glacier that today comprises the Grand Pacific glacier was a part of life in this region. Though confined at that time to the recesses of the valley, the Tlinglit still called this homeland S'e Shuyee, meaning "at the edge of the glacial silt".

During the 1750s, in a period known as "The Little Ice Age", the Grand Pacific glacier began a rapid advance. Eventually flowing "faster than a dog could run" the glacier was unstoppable. The Huna Tlinglit decamped as their homeland was consumed by the advancing ice. As the glacier sprawled forward into the open waters of Icy Strait, they dispersed throughout the area, finally settling in a new village now known as Hoonah, located on a small inlet on the southern shoreline of Icy Strait.



The retreat of the Grand Pacific glacier has revealed a fjord that currently reaches some 64 miles back into the park

In 1778, when Captain Cook first sailed into the region, the Grand Pacific Glacier lived up to its name. Cook's crew met a formidable face of ice, most likely hundreds of feet high, reaching forward into Icy Straits and stretching back as far as they could see. Some 16 years later, Captain Vancouver recorded a bay some 4 miles deep. His detailed sketches still depicted a towering glacier filling the bay, but the immense retreat of the Grand Pacific had begun.

By the 1830s, the Huna began to return to the bay during summer to fish, hunt seals and gather berries, and by 1879, when the naturalist John Muir first visited Glacier Bay, he and his Tlinglit guides travelled some 30 miles back into the newly formed bay. Today, ships travel some 64 miles back into the park, cruising along fjords that were created as the Grand Pacific advanced, and are still being revealed as this immense glacier retreats.

For Glacier Bay, the low-key arrival of John Muir in Glacier Bay was very much a turning point. His glowing descriptions of the region, combined with the tales of adventure told by returning gold prospectors put Alaska's Inside Passage on the map. Cruise ships of the day departed from Seattle and headed north, bound for the fabled, icy wilderness of Glacier Bay.

For the Tlinglit people, changing times brought many challenges, but today their deep cultural connection to Glacier Bay, a place that they see as their spiritual homeland, is now fully recognised. After a decade of planning and construction, the Huna Tribal House has now opened its doors, right alongside the main park visitor centre in Bartlett Cove at the entrance to the bay. The tribal house allows visitors to experience firsthand the rich culture of the Tlinglit people in this region. Looking ahead, the house serves as a concrete commitment to the inclusion of Tlinglit traditional knowledge and cultural practices in future management plans for the park.