

Unalakleet History

Unalakleet is located on Norton Sound at the mouth of the Unalakleet River, 148 miles southeast of Nome and 395 miles northwest of Anchorage. Archaeologists have dated house remnants along the beach ridge from 200 B.C. to 300 A.D. The name Unalakleet means “from the southern side.” Unalakleet has long been a major trade center as the terminus for the Kaltag Portage, an important winter travel route connecting to the Yukon River. Indians on the upper river were considered “professional” traders with a monopoly on the Indian-Eskimo trade across the Kaltag Portage.



The Russian-American Company built a post here in the 1830s. In 1898, reindeer herders from Lapland were brought to Unalakleet to establish sound herding practices. In 1901, the Army Signal Corps built over 605 miles of telegraph line from St. Michael to Unalakleet, over the portage to Kaltag and Fort Gibbon. The City was incorporated in 1974. Unalakleet has a history of diverse cultures and trade activity. The local economy is the most active in Norton Sound, along with a traditional Unaligmiut Eskimo subsistence lifestyle. Fish, seal, caribou, moose, and bear are utilized. The sale of alcohol is prohibited in the community, although importation and possession is allowed.

Source: State of Alaska DCRA