

Chignik — Cirniq

CIRNIMEN AGLITA. – LET’S GO TO CHIGNIK.



Photo: Chignik family ca. 1960. Nekeferof Collection.
AM580.

The salmon-rich Chignik region of the southern Alaska Peninsula is home to three Alutiiq communities, each named for the body of water it overlooks: Chignik Bay, Chignik Lagoon, and Chignik Lake. Foot trails link these small villages, winding through a lush, rolling, treeless landscape that has been home to Alutiiq people for millennia.

Although archaeological sites dot the shores of the region’s waterways, and travelers have long followed the Chignik River into the interior of the Alaska Peninsula, Chignik’s contemporary communities are relatively recent. Chignik Bay and Chignik Lagoon were established in the late 1800s as fishing communities, attracting Alutiiqs from other villages as well as people of Russian, Scandinavian, and Aleut descent. Chignik Lake grew into a community in the 1950s as families moved to the area to hunt, fish, and trap.

Today, the Chignik area is home to about three hundred people, with roughly one hundred permanent residents in each community. The region’s population doubles in the summer, as people return from Kodiak, Anchorage, and even Seattle. People make their living on fishing boats or by working in the two plants that process salmon, cod, pollock, and crab throughout the year. Subsistence activities are also important. In addition to salmon, residents harvest marine fish, crab, clams, caribou, and moose to feed their families.