

## Coal — Qetek

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### QETEGMEK CANAMAUQ. – THIS IS MADE OUT OF COAL.

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Photo: Coal artifacts from the Uyak Site, Larsen Bay Tribe collection.

Coal is a black or dark brown sedimentary rock formed from decomposed and compressed plant material. There are a number of minor coal occurrences in the Kodiak region. Lignite, a soft coal, occurs along the southeastern coast of the archipelago, in Kiliuda Bay, around Sitkalidak Island, and on the Aliulik Peninsula. Also, scientists report the presence of a higher grade, bituminous coal on Sitkinak Island. The coal seams are thin, thus none of these sources have been commercially mined. However, prehistoric residents may have used them.

Although archaeological data indicate that the prehistoric residents of Kachemak Bay burned locally available coal for fuel, coal was more commonly used to manufacture jewelry. Beginning about 2,700 years ago, Alutiiq people carved beads, pendants, nose rings, and labrets from coal. Craftsmen broke, sawed, and carved chunks of the material into desired shapes with stone tools, then polished them to a lustrous sheen.

Some people referred to this material as jet, a term used by Western craftsmen for a type of coal used to make jewelry. However, mineralogical studies suggest that the coal used by Kodiak craftsmen was probably a harder coal mined at tidewater on the Alaska Peninsula. Studies of the coal available in the Kodiak region suggest that it is either too soft or too brittle to be worked into jewelry. In contrast, a more pliable material can be found in the Ugashik and Chignik areas. These observations suggest that coal was one of the many materials Alutiiq people obtained from the Alaska mainland. Like antler, volcanic stone, and beaver incisors, Alutiiqs imported coal to Kodiak in quantity.