

Glue — Nepyutaq, Nept'staq, Nep'at'staaq

NEPT'STANEK NURYUGTUA. – I NEED SOME GLUE.



Photo: Scarfed ends of wooden hunting darts from Karluk One. Konaig, Inc. Collection, AM193.

Without the aid of nails, superglue, or duct tape, Alutiiq craftsmen invented many ingenious ways to join the pieces of their complexly designed tools. The parts of a harpoon shaft, for example, were specially carved with scarfs to fit snugly together and then lashed to hold them in place. In addition to scarfing and lashing, glue was used for a variety of projects. Some ulu handles appear to have been secured to their slate blades with glue, and mall objects, like mask attachments, may have been glued in place. Archaeologists report that birch bark was glued over the joints of prehistoric sea otter darts.

How did the Alutiiq make glue? Historic sources don't provide many clues, but information from Aleutian Island Elders illustrates one way it can be done. In the Aleutians, glue is traditionally manufactured from fur seal flippers, both front and back. About half of the blubber from the flippers is removed and then the remaining parts are boiled with water to create a thick paste. The resulting glue is particularly well suited for joining wood to wood. It creates strong, lasting bonds, but smells bad if left sitting too long. Another method of manufacturing glue is to simply boil cod eyeballs in a pot of water. The eyeballs are crushed as they cool, and then the mixture is stored in a cool, dark place in a bit of seal gut with both ends tightly tied.