

Harpoon — Ayaquq

AYAQUQ EGTAAKAIT CUUMI ARWANUN. – THEY USED TO THROW A HARPOON AT A WHALE BEFORE.



Photo: Bone harpoon head, ca. 1200 years old, Uyak Site, Larsen Bay Tribe Collection.

For thousands of years, Alutiiq people used harpoons to hunt sea mammals in Kodiak's rich marine waters. Harpoon points were carved from bone and fitted into a wooden shaft equipped with an air-filled float. Alutiiq people used two kinds of harpoon points: a barbed point that stuck directly into an animal and a toggling harpoon designed to turn sideways in prey. The float was made from an inflated seal stomach. It acted as a drag on the wounded sea mammal and made the animal more visible in the water.

Alutiiq kayakers hurled their harpoons with the help of a throwing board. This wooden tool acted as a lever, lengthening the arm and improving throwing distance. It also allowed hunters to throw with greater force. Once wounded, the sea mammal was followed until it could be dispatched with a slate lance. To save the animal's blood, which was eaten, wooden plugs were inserted into the wounds. Then the animal was tied to the hunter's kayak and towed home.