

Insect, Worm — Kinguk

KINGUT ILAIT KUMSUGNARTAARTUT. – SOME INSECTS ARE UGLY.



Photo: April Counciller wears a bug net to protect against biting insects. Outlet site, 2001.

Mosquitoes, black flies, white socks, no-see-ums, and other biting insects are an inescapable part of summer in the Gulf of Alaska. Hatched during the warming days of May, they thrive until the heavy frosts of fall. Anyone who has worked outdoors on a still day knows the agony of these pests. Early Russian explorers to the Alaska coast were amazed at the swarms of insects and reported that “itch” was a very common problem.

Alaska Natives devised many ways to control bugs. People across Alaska coated their skin with seal oil or lit smudge fires with wet moss to deter flying insects. Before the days of bug spray and citronella candles, Alutiiq people burned nettle leaves and seabeach sandwort to drive away the mosquitoes. They also fumigated their houses with the smoke from burning crowberry plants and carried angelica switches while hiking. Villages and camps were strategically located in windy areas and activities timed to coincide with breezy weather. Berry pickers, for example, would wait for a windy day to collect fruit from coastal meadows.