

Kayak — Qayaq

QAYAQ MIKTUQ. – THE KAYAK IS SMALL.



Photo: Sven Haakanson kayaking in Womens Bay.
Photo courtesy of Eric Waltenbaugh.

The Alutiiq kayak is a wood-framed boat covered with sea lion skins. Carved from driftwood, craftsmen once built each lightweight frame to fit the specific proportions of its owner. In the past, single-holed and double-holed boats were the most common, although Alutiiq craftsmen developed triple-hatched boats during the fur-trading era to carry gear for long-distance hunting trips and transport people. These larger *baidarkas*, as Russian traders called them, were more stable but required greater strength to propel.

Alutiiq kayaks have a distinctive split prow designed to slice through the waves and limit sea spray. Paddlers propelled their boats with narrow, single-bladed wooden paddles with a diamond-shaped cross-section. These paddles were specifically engineered for Kodiak's windy weather, where quick stabilizing movements are often necessary.

Men lashed their hunting implements to the deck of their kayaks within easy reach. This gear included darts, harpoons, throwing boards, a spare paddle, a wooden quiver, and a bailer. Hunters also carried a patch kit so that tears in the kayak's skin covering could be quickly mended.

In the winter, when stormy weather limited travel, Alutiiq men removed the coverings from their kayaks. They oiled the skins to maintain their water resistance and allowed the skins to rest while they repaired the boat's frame. Kayaks are still seen in local waters, although people use them for recreation more often than hunting and traveling.