

Net — Kugyaq, Kugyasiq

KUGYASIQ ATURTAAQA. – I USE THE NET.



Photo: Men beach seining in Afognak Bay, ca. 1961.
Chadwick collection.

Alutiiq people captured salmon with a variety of traditional tools. Streams were dammed with logs or stone weirs and the fish trapped behind them speared with special fish harpoons. Larger quantities of salmon, and perhaps herring and Dolly Varden, were captured with nets woven from nettle fiber and porpoise sinew. Each net was equipped with bark floats and stone sinkers—prehistoric versions of the cork and lead lines found on modern seines. Floats kept the top edge of the net on the water's surfaces and sinkers weighted the bottom edge and helped to keep the net open. Large stone anchors secured the net to the riverbed or ocean floor.

Archaeological data illustrate that Alutiiqs began using nets about 3,800 years ago. Sites from this time period contain collections of stone sinkers—small, flat beach pebbles notched at either end. Why did Alutiiq people begin using nets? Some archaeologists believe that Kodiak's population was rising and that people need to capture greater quantities of fish to feed their communities.