

Octopus — Amikuq (N), Utguiq (S)

UTGUIT YAAMAT ACAATNI ETAARTUT. – OCTOPUS ARE ALWAYS (LOCATED) UNDER ROCKS.



Photo: Boy with octopus near Old Harbor. Photo by Sven Haakanson Jr.

Kodiak's rocky shores are home to a variety of octopi. These shy creatures live in deep intertidal and shallow subtidal environments and are commonly found beneath rocks. Octopus can weigh over forty pounds. They capture fish, shellfish, and crab, which they eat with their sturdy beaks.

Octopi are traditionally captured in the spring. At low tide, collectors will comb the beach looking for clusters of rocks. A scattering of broken clamshells is a good sign an octopus is nearby. When the collector finds a likely spot there are a number of ways to capture the octopus. One way is to poke a stick under the rock and pull it back quickly. If you are lucky, the octopus will grab hold and come out with the stick. A piece of bark tied to the stick will sometimes attract the animal. In the past, people poured a little household bleach at the base of a rock. This method flushed the animal from its hiding place, but it is now illegal.

The next step is to grab the back of the animal's head and flip it inside. This paralyzes the animal so it can be killed and gutted. Be careful of the animal's beak, however, as a strike hurts! Once gutted, people tenderize octopus by pounding the carcass on a rock. Then they wash it clean with seawater.

Octopus is delicious and this low-fat seafood can be eaten in many ways. In Alutiiq communities, it is frequently boiled. Pieces of the meat are then dipped in seal oil, butter, or barbeque sauce, or battered and fried. Some people chop or the meat and mix it with a batter to make fritters. Octopus is also used as fishing bait.