

Pink Salmon — Amartuq, Amaqaayak

AMARTUT ANGITUT. – THE PINK SALMON (HUMPIES) ARE COMING BACK.



Photo: Freshly caught pink salmon on a Kodiak Island beach.

Pink salmon (*Oncorhynchus gorbuscha*), also known as humpbacks or humpies, are the most abundant variety of Pacific salmon. In North America these three- to four-pound fish range from California's Russian River to Canada's McKenzie River. The Kodiak Archipelago has more than three hundred known pink salmon streams. Each year millions of fish return to these waterways, spawning in river gravels between late July and mid-October. According to Alutiiq folklore, when the salmonberries are abundant, pink salmon runs will be strong.

Pink salmon has long been a focal resource for Alutiiq families. Archaeologists find ancient fish camps on many Kodiak pink salmon streams. Here fish were caught with nets, trapped behind weirs, speared with leisters, or captured with special salmon harpoons. They were taken in large quantities, processed, and stored for winter use, particularly in the late prehistoric period.

Today, Alutiiq people harvest pink salmon both commercially and for the dinner table. The thinner, less fatty filets are perfect for smoking and drying. The hump of a spawning male, which is eaten raw, is considered a great delicacy. To add flavor, some people wipe the hump with fresh cow parsnip leaves. Pink salmon are also cut into steaks and boiled or added to fish soup, head and all.