

Real People — Sugpiat

GUANGKUTA “SUGPIANEK” AP’RTAAKIIKUT CUUMI, NUTAAN AP’RTAARAAKUT ALUTIIIT. – THEY USED TO CALL US SUGPIAQ BEFORE, BUT NOW WE ARE CALLED ALUTHIQ PEOPLE.



Photo: Boy's party, Karluk. Clyda Christiansen Collection.

Who are Kodiak’s Native people? This is a common question. Russian fur traders called them the Aleut, a word derived from a Siberian Native language that means coastal dweller. The Russian’s applied this term to all of the indigenous people they encountered, from the Aleutian Islands to Prince William Sound, regardless of their unique cultural heritages. On Kodiak, Sugpiaq (pluralized Sugpiat) was the traditional name for the people. Derived from the word *suk*, which means person, and *-piat* a suffix meaning real or genuine, Sugpiat translates as the real people. Many indigenous societies use similar terms. Yup’ik, the preferred designation of the Native people of western Alaska, also means “real people,” and Unangan, the preferred designation of Aleutian Islanders, translates as “we the people.”

Today many of Kodiak’s Native people refer to themselves as Alutiiq, which is the Sugpiat way of saying Aleut. Alutiiq remains popular as it highlights unique cultural qualities while retaining part of the word Aleut. However, there are still many people who prefer to be called Aleut, or who use the terms Aleut, Alutiiq, and Sugpiaq interchangeably. It is important to note, however, that most of Kodiak’s Native people recognize that the Aleut people of the Aleutian Island and those of Kodiak are culturally distinct.