

Snow Goggles — Iingalarsuutek

IINGALARSUUTEGKEN ATURKEK. – USE YOUR SNOW GOGGLES.



Photo: Fragment of ivory snow goggles from Alaska.

Although snow can provide a helpful surface for traveling, transporting goods, and tracking animals, it also presents challenges. One of these is snow blindness. The bright reflection of the sun's ultraviolet rays off the snow's white surface can damage a traveler's eyes. Known as photokeratitis, this condition is essentially sunburned eyes. It can affect the thin outer surface of the eye, the inside of the eyelids, and the whites of the eye. People who experience snow blindness often don't notice that their eyes have been burned until they experience redness, blurry vision, tearing, a gritty feeling, sensitivity to light, or even temporary blindness.

Photokeratitis can be a problem in Alaska during the long days of spring. To protect their eyes from snow glare, Alutiiq people fashioned a variety of goggles from wood, bone, and even baleen. In Prince William Sound, people sewed baleen eyeshades into fur caps, and on the Alaska Peninsula, hunters carved wooden goggles with narrow eye slits that they tied around their heads with strips of sinew. Like sunglasses, these slits emitted enough light to see but limited harmful glare.