

Sockeye Salmon — Niklliq

NIKLLINEK KUPCUUNALIRCIQUT. – WE ARE GOING TO MAKE SMOKED SALMON OUT OF RED SALMON.



Photo: Freshly caught red salmon on a Kodiak beach.

Sockeye salmon, or red salmon (*Oncorhynchus nerka*), are the first salmon to move into Kodiak's freshwater streams each year. They begin arriving in early May and are the second most abundant salmon species. More than two million return annually, with peak runs in August and September. Unlike pink and silver salmon, however, reds are not evenly distributed, because they require lake-headed streams for spawning. There are only thirty suitable streams in the Kodiak area. Reds spawn primarily in the major river systems of southwestern Kodiak. Over half the population can be found in the Karluk, Ayakulik, and Frazer rivers, and Olga Creek.

Archaeological data show that Alutiiq people have harvested red salmon from these important streams for thousands of years. Along the Karluk River alone, there are dozens of settlements dating from 6,000 years ago to the historic era. Many have large sod houses framed with wood, indicating that these were not temporary settlements, but places where people intended to stay for

long periods of time. In the late prehistoric era, people may have occupied these settlements year-round, paddling to the coast for the marine resources they needed, and for visiting and trading.

From these villages, Alutiiq people captured salmon at weirs with traps and spears. Simple barriers of logs or rocks were built in streams to keep fish from passing. This allowed fishermen to spear fish with special harpoons carved of bone. According to traditional beliefs, the soul of a fish lived in its guts. Once captured, the intestines had to be returned to the water to free the soul and produce more fish.