

## Starry Flounder — Waa'uq

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### WAA'UT PITURNIRTAARTUT MIKELNGUT. – THE SMALL FLOUNDERS ARE TASTY.

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Photo: Ice fishing for flounder, Karluk Lagoon.  
Alutiiq Museum library, courtesy of Patty Mahoney.

The starry flounder (*Platichthys stellatus*) is an abundant, bottom-dwelling fish found in Kodiak's shallow ocean waters, brackish estuaries, and even intertidal areas of rivers. Like halibut, flounder have both eyes on one side of their head. The eye side of the flounder is typically brown or black, and the blind side of the fish is white. However, this fish can camouflage itself by changing its color to blend with the surrounding environment. Flounder live throughout the North Pacific from California to Japan, where they can grow up to three feet long and weigh twenty pounds. Birds, sea mammals, and people eat flounder.

Alutiiq people once harvested flounder with fishing spears known as leisters. These leisters had a series of long, narrow, barbed bone points tied around a central shaft. The points curved inward to form a multipronged spear used to impale fish resting on the bottom of shallow lagoons, swimming in shallow waters, or caught in traps. To pursue flounder, fishermen would wait in boats or stand quietly in the water until a fish was visible. A calm day and clear water were essential for this type of flounder fishing.

Flounder can be captured at all times of the year, but they are most important to Alutiiq people in winter and spring, when poor weather limits access to fish in deeper, less protected ocean waters. Alutiiq people prize the flounder, an oily fish like king salmon or herring, for its fat.