

Swim — Kuimarluni

PIUGTA IMARM I KUIMARTUQ. – THE DOG IS SWIMMING IN THE OCEAN.



Photo: Boys swimming near Ouzinkie, ca. 1940.
Smith Collection, courtesy of Tim and Norman Smith.

Surrounded by sparkling ocean waters and fantastic scenery, Kodiak may seem like an ideal place for a summer swim but consider the water temperature. Although the archipelago lies in the path of the Alaska current, a flow of warm water that streams out of the central Pacific and circulates along the gulf coast, water temperatures are always chilly. Close to shore, surface temperatures rarely hit fifty degrees Fahrenheit, and they are often lower due to cold water runoff from rainfall and melting mountain snows.

In classical Alutiiq society, swimming was thought to build character. Children were encouraged to swim in all seasons to increase their tolerance to the cold. Russian explorers noted that Alutiiq men often refreshed themselves with a swim after steam bathing, a practice that some continue today. Today, youngsters enjoy a swim on sunny summer days, taking dips while picnicking and playing on local beaches. One trick for more comfortable swimming is to wait for the sun to warm shallow waters left by a falling tide. Swimmers who brave the flood that accompanies a rising tide encounter much colder ocean water.