

Village, Land — Nunarpet

GUANGKUTA NUNARPET. – THIS IS OUR LAND.



Photo: Village of Old Harbor before the 1964 earthquake and tsunami. Smith Collection, courtesy of Tim and Norman Smith.

When Russian traders arrived in the Kodiak Archipelago, there were more than sixty Alutiiq villages. Rows of sod houses formed coastal communities that were home to as many as three hundred people. Chiefs governed villages, acting as political and economic leaders. Russian accounts suggest there were also regional chiefs, powerful people who administered several villages.

With the loss of lives and political autonomy that accompanied western colonization, the number of Alutiiq communities dwindled. Following the devastating smallpox epidemic of 1838, the Russians resettled Alutiiq survivors into seven major villages. St. Paul, Woody Island, Afognak, Eagle Harbor, Old Harbor, Karluk, and Chirikof were the central Alutiiq communities during the final decades of Russian rule, although not the only communities. Many of the old villages were soon reestablished, although in some cases in shifted locations.

Today, the Kodiak Archipelago is home to six distinct Alutiiq villages, accessible only by air or boat. Akhiok and Karluk lie in the windswept meadows of southwestern Kodiak, nestled among the island's rich salmon streams. Larsen Bay is tucked into the shores of Uyak Bay, a protected glacial fjord, while Old Harbor faces eastward toward the broad expanse of the North Pacific Ocean. And spruce trees and sphagnum moss provide the setting for Port Lions and Ouzinkie, Kodiak's northernmost Alutiiq communities.