

Volcano — Puyulek

PUYULEK YAKGUANI ET'AARTUT, INGRINI. – THE VOLCANOES ARE FAR AWAY, IN THE MOUNTAINS.



Photo: A volcano rises above the King Salmon River, Alaska Peninsula.

Although there are no volcanoes in the Kodiak Archipelago, the mountainous Alaska Peninsula and the Aleutian Island chain are formed largely by volcanic activity. Along this expanse of Alaska's coast there are at least eighty volcanoes that have been active in the past eleven thousand years, spewing ash and pumice into the ecosystem.

For Alutiiq people, volcanic eruptions have long threatened life, property, and economy. The most spectacular event in recent memory was the explosion of Novarupta in 1912, an adjunct of the Katmai volcano on the Alaska Peninsula. The nearby villages of Katmai, Douglas, and Savonoski were destroyed, and an enormous plume of ash smothered shellfish and deciduous vegetation, choked salmon streams, changed the distribution of marine fish and sea mammals, and killed seaweed and kelp beds as far away as the city of Kodiak. Today, a thick layer of beige-colored ash represents this eruption. It is visible below the modern ground surface at the north end of the Kodiak Archipelago.

A record of at least one prehistoric eruption is preserved in Alutiiq art. A five-hundred-year-old painted box panel from Karluk shows an exploding volcano. Geologists note that the image looks much like Mt. Augustine, a volcano in Cook Inlet that erupted about five hundred years ago. Whether or not the eruption on the panel depicts this particular event, it represents the earliest known human record of a volcanic episode in Alaska.