

Wave — Qangyuk

KAL'UNI QANGYUT ANGTAARTUT. – THE WAVES ARE ALWAYS BIG AT KARLUK.



Photo: Waves collide with the shore of Cape Alitak, May, 2010.

Rough water is a fact of life in the Gulf of Alaska, where wave production is closely related to the speed and duration of local winds. Heavy seas are particularly common in fall and winter, produced by frequent, powerful storms. Waves associated with these storms regularly reach heights of twenty feet and can build to over thirty feet. Around Kodiak, the severity of heavy seas is compounded by the region's considerable fetch, the distance the wind travels over the open ocean. Storms approaching the archipelago cross vast stretches of the North Pacific, building energy.

For mariners, waves present many challenges. Making forward progress, steering, launching, landing, and avoiding hypothermia are all more difficult in rough water. Classical Alutiiq boats—skin-covered *qayat* and *angyat*—were expertly designed for this environment. Alutiiq people carved bow pieces from a single piece of wood to ensure their strength and designed these pieces with a curve that helped propel boats over the waves. Similarly, a flexible wooden frame allowed vessels to bend with pressure and a skin cover sewn with waterproof stitches ensured a

dry boat.

A boater's skills were also critical to safe travel. Men learned to launch boats in the surf by watching the rhythm of the waves and finding a lull in the breakers. They also learned to paddle from a kneeling position, using their bodies to help steer through rolling water.