

## Whale — Ar'uq, Arwaq (in Akhiok)

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### AR'UT AMLERTUT. – THERE ARE MANY WHALES.

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Photo: Whale surfacing in Monashka Bay.

Six species of baleen whales feed in the coastal waters of the Gulf of Alaska. Each spring, grey, humpback, minke, fin, right, and blue whales swim by on their way to the Bering Sea, although many remain in the Kodiak area. For Alutiiqs, these animals represented an enormous resource. Even a small whale could feed a community for weeks. In addition to their highly prized meat and fat, whales provided bone for tools, baleen for baskets and cordage, and flexible membranes for clothing.

Whaling is an ancient Alutiiq tradition. Archaeologists find whalebone in sites many thousands of years old. These bones may be the result of a hunter's lance, or perhaps they were scavenged from dead whales that washed ashore. Historic accounts tell that whalers were a select group of powerful people, literally known as "shamans who hunt whales." Lone hunters armed with slate-tipped spears dipped in a powerful poison pursued the great animals by kayak. Once speared, the

whale was left to die and wash ashore.

Although hunting technologies changed in the historic era, Alutiiq men continued to pursue whales from the Port Hobron whaling station on Sitkalidak Island in the early decades of this century. With steel-hulled ships and gunpowder-charged harpoons, they harvested oil, baleen, and whalebone for American industries.