

Woody Island — Tangirnaq

TANGIRNAQ CUUMI SUU'UT AMLELLRIIT. – WOODY ISLAND ONCE HAD MANY PEOPLE.



Photo: Shore of Woody Island that faces the City of Kodiak.

Woody Island is a small piece of land that lies at the northern entrance to Chiniak Bay, just two miles from the city of Kodiak. It is part of a cluster of islands that provides shelter for Kodiak's harbors. Woody Island is four miles long and two miles wide. It has seven small lakes and about thirteen miles of coastline. By Kodiak standards, this is a small island, yet it has a rich and remarkable history.

Archaeological data indicate that Alutiiq people occupied the island for millennia. Prehistoric sites are common on Woody Island, and when Russian traders arrived, the major Alutiiq village in northern Chiniak Bay lay on Woody Island's western coast. Known by its Alutiiq name Tangirnaq, this village was home to hundreds of residents who called themselves Tangirnarmiut, the people of Tangirnaq. The Russians called this settlement Ostrov Leisnoi or wooded island.

In the late eighteenth century, Alutiiq residents of Woody Island were forced to hunt sea otters and process food for Russian traders. This was the first of many western enterprises on the island. In the early 1800s, Russian entrepreneurs processed salt on Woody Island, made bricks, and harvested ice. In 1893, Baptist missionaries established an orphanage and school near the village. In the early 1900s, the navy built a wireless station on the island, and during the Second World War, the army erected a sawmill and the Federal Aviation Administration built a communications station. In the 1960s, when the community's public school closed and ferry service to Kodiak was discontinued, many families moved to Kodiak. While no Alutiiq families live on the island now, people still harvest subsistence foods around Tangirnaq and consider it their home.