

Whisker — Ungak

ANGUTET AWA'I UNGAT'STAARTUT KANGILLAUWAQAMENG. – ELDERS ALWAYS LET THEIR WHISKERS GROW WHEN THEY GET OLD.



Photo: A sea lion in the waters of Kizhuyak Bay.

Like all men, Alutiiq men grow facial hair. In classical society, some wore small beards and mustaches while others plucked their faces clean. In Prince William Sound, Chugach Alutiiq men pulled out their facial hair with their fingers.

Although men often removed their own whiskers, animal whiskers were commonly used for personal adornment. In addition to bone tubes, men threaded sea lion whiskers through holes in their nasal cartilage and attached sprays of whiskers to a variety of hats. Artists fastened whiskers threaded with tiny beads and decorated with tassels of color thread to elaborate wooden hunting visors. These whiskers were tied to the rear of large closed crowned hats and to the sides and tops of visors. Individual whiskers were secured by looping them through a pair of small, drilled holes and then tying the end of the whisker to its shaft with a piece of sinew thread. Some hats featured a few whiskers. Others displayed dramatic sprays, which looked like the plumage of a bird.

Bundles of whiskers were also tied to hats woven from spruce roots. One such hat, collected in Karluk in 1884, features two bundles of more than seventeen whiskers each. These bundles were wrapped with red trade cloth and fastened to either side of the hat. Painted blue and decorated with shells obtained in trade, this hat was probably a symbol of its wearer's great wealth and power.