

Sun — Macaq

MAANINGUALL'RAQ MACAMEK TANG'RPAKARTAA'ITUKUT. – AROUND HERE (PITIFULLY) WE DO NOT SEE THE SUN.



Photo: A Kodiak Sunset

Sunshine is an important ingredient in Alutiiq subsistence activities. To preserve the quantities of meat, fish, and even plants harvested during the productive summer months, families need dry weather. Without it, foods do not desiccate and can spoil rapidly in the damp Kodiak environment. Even the best hunter can experience a lean winter if a wet summer makes processing his catch difficult. With luck, families had some sunshine and a little wind to speed the process.

Sunshine was also important for drying the plant fibers used in weaving many common objects - baskets for carrying, cooking, and storing foods, mats for household use, woven clothing, and cordage. The Alutiiq also used the sun to soften spruce pitch, used to waterproof kayak seams and patch dories. To coax the sun from behind the clouds, and to hasten its return during the dark days of winter, Alutiiq children played a sunrise game with a wooden bead on a string.

According to Alutiiq lore, the sun is a spirit who lives in the fifth sky world - the one that is closest to earth. A number of legends explain the origin of the sun. In one, a man fell in love with his beautiful sister and they had twins. One twin became the moon, the other the sun. Another legend says that the sun is a man from Cook Inlet who fled to the sky after killing his brother. One side of him shines during the day as the sun, the other at night as the moon. And in a story from Kodiak, Raven brought daylight to his community by capturing the sun, moon, and stars from a stingy chief and releasing them from their boxes into the sky.