

Footprint — Tuma, Tumet

TAQUKARAAT TUMAIT ANG'UT. – THE BEARS' FOOTPRINTS ARE LARGE.



Photo: Bear footprints in the sand of a Kodiak beach.

Like animal tracks, human footprints are a common part of the Kodiak environment. Today Kodiak's muddy shores capture the tread of sneakers and rubber boots, but in the past, they recorded the passage of bare feet. Kodiak Alutiiq people seldom wore shoes, saving hand-sewn footwear of salmon skins and sea mammal hide for the coldest weather. Until the early twentieth century, most people went barefoot, even small children and people dressed for church.

From footprints, it is possible to estimate the size, age, and gait of a person and to tell how recently they passed by. As such, ancestral Alutiiq people were keen observers of not only bear and otter tracks but of the footprints left by people and spirits in human form. Alutiiq legends record this practice. In traditional tales, footprints provide vital clues about the activities of others, concrete evidence in a world often filled with deception.

One legend reports that deep indentations in bedrock are the footprints of heavy, powerful beings. Another records a young man improving his hunting luck after footprints help him to find an encampment of spirits. In a third tale, footprints lead a woman to her missing husband. The man, who deserted his wife, wished her to believe he was dead. However, when she recognized his footprints along the beach, she knew he had carried his kayak to the water recently. She went in search of him and discovered that he was alive and living with another woman.