

Fish Head — Iqallum Nasqua

TANG'RK'GKA IQALLUM NASQUA SUUPAMI! – I SAW A FISH HEAD IN THE SOUP!



Photo: Fresh caught cod.

From Chile to China and Jamaica to Scotland, people recognize fish heads as a delicious, nutritious, and versatile food. Some cultures make soup with whole fish heads floating in the broth. Others simmer the heads to make a flavorful stock or remove the meat, fat, cartilage, and gelatinous eyes for use in recipes. Fish heads are a widely enjoyed food.

Fish heads are an enduring part of Alutiiq culinary tradition. During the cannery days in Karluk, fish processors discarded salmon heads, dumping them into the water along the shore of the lagoon. Alutiiq residents collect the heads for food, sometimes harvesting salmon tongues on the beach and enjoying them raw. Elder also recall wrapping fish heads in cow parsnip leaves and burying them to soften or storing fish heads in barrels for future use.

Today, Alutiiq people make fish head soup using the heads, tails, and trimmings of any local fish. There are many recipes for this dish. One woman recommends putting about a pound and a half of fish parts into a pot of simmering water. To this, she adds carrots, celery, onion, bay leaves, thyme, parsley, peppercorns, cloves, and the juice and rind of an entire lemon. When the fish meat falls off the bone, she strains the liquid and uses it as a soup base or sauce. The village dogs get everything that doesn't go through the strainer!