

Portage — Aimqaaq

KANGIYAMEK PORTAGE BAY-MEN AIMQARTAALLRIIT. – THEY USED TO PORTAGE FROM KAGUYAK TO PORTAGE BAY.



Photo: Portage trail from the head of Akalura Lake to the head of Red Lake.

Traveling overland can be difficult on Kodiak. Thick brush, swampy lowlands, and steep slopes can make walking slow and frustrating. Fittingly, the Alutiiq verb for portage, *aimqaaq*, literally means ‘vegetation broken off here and there’. However, there are times when traveling overland is safer than boating. Along Kodiak’s complex coastline, there are many places where portaging several miles is preferable, and quicker than paddling around treacherous capes.

One of the most well-known portages is the short hike from the Karluk River to the head of Larsen Bay, but there are many others. A portage trail can still be found between Red Lake and Akalura Lake, and Elders recall portaging between the Alitak Bay and the eastern coast of Kodiak Island. From the head of aptly named Portage Bay, it is possible to follow low-lying topography into the head of Kiavak Bay on the adjacent coast of Kodiak—a walking distance of about 5 km. In 1904, Russian Orthodox Priest Tikhon Shalamov portaged into Kiavak Bay with men from Akhiok, to avoid paddling through rough ocean waters.

Place names also record portage routes. Perenosa, the name of a bay on northern Afognak Island, comes from the Russian—*Pyeryenosnaya Bukhta*. The literal translation of Perenosa is ‘transport bay’ or ‘portage bay’. This name likely refers to the overland corridor from the head of Discoverer Bay, an arm of Perenosa, to the head of Kazakof Bay on southern Afognak Island. This route follows the lowlands along Portage Creek and Portage Lake. Alphonse Pinart, a French anthropologist who visited Afognak Island in the winter of 1871-1872 reported that it took Alutiiq people two days to walk this corridor.